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Foreign Classics for English Readers

EDITED BY

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MONTAIGNE

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MONTAIGNE

BY THE

REV. W. LUCAS COLLINS, M.A.

AUTHOR OF

'ETONIANA,' THE 'PUBLIC SCHOOLS,' ETC.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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MONTAIGNE.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY LIFE.

"MONTAIGNE THE ESSAYIST" is a name familiar enough to many readers who have never opened a page of his volumes. He has been admired, quoted, borrowed from, openly and covertly, more than any writer of his day. His incisive sentences attract us continually in all kinds of setting, serious or satiric—in reviews, in leading articles, in essays moulded on his pattern; and we meet with his thoughts and fancies, new dressed and not always improved, often when we are quite unconscious whose company we are in. Pascal, La Bruyère, Montesquieu, Rousseau, amongst his own countrymen—Shakspeare,[1] Ben Jonson, Butler and Pope, Sterne and Swift,

[1] The supposed autograph and MS. notes of Shakspeare in the copy of Florio's 'Montaigne,' bearing date 1603, in the library of the British Museum, are of very doubtful authenticity. But there can be little doubt that Shakspeare had seen the Essays in some form. The following passage from 'The Tempest' is taken almost word

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amongst our English writers—to say nothing of more modern literature, had all handled, and, with one or two notable exceptions, loved him more or less. His was the only book, says Voltaire, which, before the publication of Corneille's tragedies, attracted the attention of the few foreigners who could read French.

Montaigne "the Essayist;" it is the title which belongs to him of right, and by which he would have wished to be remembered. Others wrote books, professedly; he did but make "attempts." It does not follow that there was more modesty in the word by which he calls his writings than there is in the modern writer who adopts it on the title-page of a work which he has carefully prepared and polished, and which he would be very sorry for the public to regard as merely an "attempt." But with Montaigne and from Montaigne the "Essay," as a literary term and as a literary existence, first originated. He has had hosts of imitators, more or less successful; but none who has equalled or even approached him. He stands at the head of a long line of charming writers, who have put on record their experiences of life, their opinions of men and things, their pregnant thoughts or their lighter fancies, with the informal grace and ease of choice conversation—still the best as he was the

for word from the fanciful description of an imaginary Utopia in the essay "On Cannibals" (I. 30):—

Gonzalo. "I' the commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil,
No occupation; all men idle, all,
And women too."—*Tempest*, Act ii. sc. 1.

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first. He is admirable still to us moderns. He was a new revelation to the age in which he wrote, though it was so startled at the breach of all the forms and conventionalities of authorship that it was slow in allowing itself to be delighted.

It is much to the advantage both of writer and reader, that it is impossible in these pages to separate the Essayist from the Essays. Often, as we know, the author lives, and acts, and feels, quite apart from his book. The learned and eloquent teacher may not always be a model in private life; the clever satirist may be personally the very incarnation of good-nature; the happiest jester on paper may be almost a hypochondriac when the pen is out of his hand. But it is far different in Montaigne's case. "All the world knows me in my book, and my book in me." It is at least not from any reticence on his part if the knowledge is not complete. When Henry of Valois told him that he liked his book, the answer was as pertinent as it was happily expressed, "Then your Majesty must needs like me—for my book contains nothing but a dissertation on myself and my notions." People might learn as much of him, he says, "from his book in three days, as in three years' acquaintance." He is his own Boswell. No writer, with the exception of Cicero, makes us so intimately acquainted with his own character. As we have "Cicero in his Letters,"[1] so we have Montaigne in his Essays: and with the same charming ease and grace, there is something of the same vanity, and the same confessions of weakness in both. But Cicero only took his friends into his confidence—for we cannot say that his letters were intended for

[1] "Cicero en seinen Briefen:"—Abeken.

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publication—whereas Montaigne advisedly prefers the public as his confidant. "Many things," he says, "which I would not confess to any one individual, I intrust to the public: and for my most secret thoughts and conscience refer my most trusted friends to the bookseller's shop."

"To meet the objections of the Huguenots, who condemn our auricular and private confession, I confess myself in public, religiously and honestly. St Augustin, Origen, and Hippocrates have confessed their errors of opinion: I go further, and confess my errors of conduct. I hunger to make myself known, and I do not care to how many, provided it be the truth."—(III. 5.)

"I leave nothing for people to wish for or guess at about myself. If they must be talking of me, I would have them do so fairly and truly. I would willingly come back from the other world to give the lie to any one who should make me out to be other than I am, though it were intended to do me honour."—(III. 9.)

He has left us, it is true, no connected autobiography. Such a record would have been far too formal and methodical to find favour in his eyes. But scattered up and down amongst the three Books of the Essays, we find quite sufficient information as to the author himself—his family, his education, his position in life, his public and private employments, his foreign travels, and his daily life at home, as well as to the personal habits and tastes and opinions of which he makes such ample and minute revelation.

He has found some enthusiastic admirers among his own countrymen of the present day, who have patiently and perseveringly hunted out every record which could be traced of himself and his family. Never, perhaps,

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except in the case of our own Shakspeare, have such pains been taken to recover, from every possible source, the scattered memorials of a popular author. Foremost amongst these diligent inquirers have been Dr Payen and M. Grün. They have succeeded in correcting some few mistakes about him, and supplying some particulars of his family history; but the additional information which they have contributed, and some letters which have recently been discovered, illustrate his brief public life rather than the personality of the author.

He was the third son of Pierre Eyquem, Seigneur de Montaigne—a moderate country estate in Perigord, a district of the old province of Guienne—and also of other houses and lands known as La Brousse, Beauregard, and Mattecoulon. He is inclined to think the family was originally English, and says the name was still known there in his days, in which case it might have been Egham, or Higham, or Ockham. In Bordeaux, where the father had also a house, the Eyquems were of good *bourgeois* rank, and possibly, as the Essayist himself would gladly believe, of noble origin. His own branch of the family had dropped the original surname, and styled themselves from their chief estate in the country, where they had now been settled apparently for several generations.

Pierre Eyquem, or Pierre de Montaigne, the father, figures prominently in the personal recollections of his son. Though engaged in some kind of commerce at Bordeaux, where in later life he filled some important public offices, he had passed most of his earlier years in the profession of arms. We should know more about him if we could see, as his son did, the journal which he

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kept,—a custom which the Essayist blames himself for not having followed, as one time he made an attempt to do. The father had followed Francis the First to his Italian campaigns, saw considerable service there, and was probably (some think) among the prisoners taken at Pavia, as his son speaks of him as having been in Milan during its subsequent occupation by the Spaniards. He had thus had full opportunity of acquiring all the experience of a man of the world, and of this his son reaped the advantage. But at the same time he had some eccentric crotchets of his own, both philanthropic and educational. There must have been very much in his character to inspire respect and affection in his own family, for his son Michel, never lavish of his eulogiums, returns again and again to the praises of his father,—in this reminding us forcibly of Horace, with whom in other points, pleasant and unpleasant, he has so much in common. He calls him "the best and most indulgent father that ever was;"—"the good father that God gave me, who has nothing from me save the acknowledgment of his goodness, but that of the most lively kind."

"My father took delight in building at Montaigne, where he was born; and in all such matters of domestic policy I love to follow his example and rules, and to attach my successors to them so far as I can. If I could do anything better for him I would; I have a pride in feeling that his will is still exercising itself and acting through me. God forbid that I should allow any shadow of life, that I could restore to so good a father, to be lost in my hands!"—(III. 9.)

Even more touching in its filial tenderness, from its very triviality of detail, is the respect which he pays to the little personal relics which reminded him of his

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father's daily habits. He still keeps carefully in his cabinet certain long wands which the elder Montaigne used to carry in his hand when he walked; he seldom dresses in any other colours than black and white, because such had been his father's custom; and there is an old military cloak that had belonged to him, a kind of heirloom in the house, which he wore constantly in his rides, because, he says, "when I have this on, I seem to wrap myself up in my father." Such description as he gives of him is touched with a loving hand.

"He spoke little but well, and would still mingle in his discourse illustrations out of modern authors, especially Spanish; and amongst the Spanish, a favourite one with him was the book they call 'Marcus Aurelius.'[1] His carriage was of a pleasant gravity, humble and very modest; he was scrupulously attentive to cleanliness and neatness in his person and dress, whether on foot or on horseback; exceedingly faithful to his word, and of a conscientiousness and religiousness tending rather towards superstition than towards the other extreme. For a man of small stature he was of great strength, with a figure erect and well-proportioned, of a pleasant countenance, and somewhat dark complexion; adroit and skilful in all noble exercises. I have still in my possession canes loaded with lead, with which they say he used to exercise his arms for throwing the bar, or the stone, or for wrestling: and shoes with lead in the soles, to make him lighter for running or leaping. Of his standing-jumps he has left small miracles on record. I have seen him, when past threescore, laugh at our attempts at agility; vaulting upon a horse in his furred gown, going round a table on his thumb, and hardly ever going up-stairs to his chamber without taking two or three steps at a time."—(II. 2.)

[1] A treatise by Antonio de Guevara, known as "The Golden Book." Casaubon asserts that no book had been so often translated and reprinted, except the Bible.

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In spite of his soldier life and his occupations as an active citizen at Bordeaux, Montaigne the elder had a strong turn for letters and literary society.

"My house has been long open to men of learning, and is very well known to them: for my father, who bore rule in it for fifty years and more, inflamed by the new zeal with which Francis the First embraced letters and brought them into repute, sought out the acquaintance of learned men at considerable pains and cost, and received them into his house as sacred personages, who possessed some special inspiration of divine wisdom; gathering up their maxims and their conversation as so many oracles, and with all the more reverence and veneration that he had little claim to judge of them critically, for he had no acquaintance with letters, any more than his predecessors."—(II. 12 *ad init.*)

How Pierre de Montaigne disposed of his two elder sons we do not know; both, probably, like himself, adopted the profession of arms. The second, Arnaud, who is called "Captain" St Martin, was killed at twenty-three by a blow from a tennis-ball. But to Michel, the third, he determined to give, according to some peculiar notions of his own, a liberal education. The boy seems to have been naturally of a delicate constitution. He was brought up, he tells us, "in gentle and delicate fashion, free from all rigorous discipline." He remembers to have been whipped only twice in his life. He was, in fact, made from his earliest years the subject of an original experiment in mental and bodily training. It began in his cradle. He was put out at nurse with a peasant woman in one of the villages on the estate, and remained in her care till he was beyond infancy, in order to accustom him "to the humblest and commonest way of living." At his baptism, the god-parents whom the

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father chose for him were persons of the humblest rank: it was better, he thought, for his son to "decline gradually from a life of privation than to make the hard ascent to it afterwards."

"This fancy of his had another object in view, to link me with the common people, and with those whose condition in life makes them in need of our assistance. He reckoned that I should feel more bound to regard those who held out their arms to me than those who turned their backs upon me. And it was for this reason he gave me to be held at the font by persons of the meanest condition, in order to bind and attach me to them. His design has not altogether ill succeeded. I attach myself very readily to the lower orders, whether it be because one gets more honour in such intercourse, or out of a natural compassion which is very strong in me."—(III. 13.)

It was a remarkable feeling in a French gentleman of that century, with all his experience of foreign campaigns in which human life was held cheap, and the sufferings of the masses were of lightest account in comparison with the glory and ambition of kings and nobles. A true and kindly gentleman must have been Montaigne the elder, of a nobility which no amount of quarterings could have given him. It makes us quite ready to believe the assurance which his son gives us elsewhere, that amidst all the licence of court and camp he had kept "the white flower of a blameless life" unstained. We do not wonder that from such a father the son early learnt to hate a lie above all things; that even in childish games he had been taught to abhor all tricks and cheating. "I am sprung," he says, "from a family which has run its course without distinction and without making much noise in the world, but which has from time immemorial

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been specially ambitious of a character for truth and uprightness."[1] In this love of truth, in kindness of heart, and in a benevolence towards the suffering peasantry too rarely seen in those days, Michel worthily represented his father. In purity of morals he might admire the father's example, but he never strove to follow it.

The peculiar gentleness of Pierre de Montaigne's character shows itself throughout the whole course of the young Michel's education, often in somewhat fantastic shapes. Having heard that "it disturbs the tender brain of children to awake them suddenly in the morning, and to rouse them out of sleep (in which they are sunk much more soundly than we are) all at once," he had the boy wakened every morning by the sound of music, and even kept a musician for that special purpose.[2] Certainly no pains or cost were spared in any way during the whole of this educational experiment, which the subject of it describes at some length.

"Greek and Latin are undoubtedly accomplishments both ornamental and important; but we buy them too dear. I will mention a mode of acquiring them at cheaper cost than ordinary, which was tried in my own case. My late father, after making all the inquiries that a man could make amongst men of learning and judgment as to a perfect form of education, was cautioned against the unsuitableness of the method in fashion; and they told him that the only reason why we do not attain to the greatness of soul and intellect of the

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[1] III. 10.

[2] The story of the young Montaigne's education had probably a wider influence than we are generally aware of. It is recorded of Bishop Horne that his father used always to awake him, during his childhood, by playing on the flute, for the reason here given by Montaigne: and a similar story is told of William Jones "of Nayland."

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ancient Greeks and Romans was the length of time we give to learning these languages, which cost them nothing. (I do not myself believe that is the only reason.) However, the expedient my father hit upon was to give me in charge, while I was yet at nurse, and before I could speak plainly, to a German (who died afterwards the most celebrated physician in France) entirely ignorant of our language, and very well versed in Latin. This gentleman, whom he had sent for expressly, and who was engaged at very high terms, had me continually under his hands. There were also under him two others, less learned, to attend upon me, and to relieve the first; they never spoke to me in any other language than Latin. As to the rest of the household, it was an inviolable rule that neither my father himself, nor my mother, nor valet, nor chambermaid should speak anything in my presence but such few Latin words as each had learnt in order to talk with me. It is wonderful what an advantage it was to all of them. My father and mother learnt enough Latin to understand it, and acquired sufficient command of it to use it on occasion, as did also those of the domestics whose more particular duty it was to wait upon me. In short, we all Latined it to such a degree that it overflowed into our villages all round, where there still linger many Latin terms for workmen and their tools, which have gained footing among the people from long usage."

No doubt, the carrying out of his whim was an intense interest and amusement to the father, who appears to have had a most accommodating household; but one has some curiosity to know what Madame de Montaigne, and the valet, and the chambermaids, thought of it all, and how far they appreciated the "great advantage" which the filial piety of the son saw in this compulsory latinity.

"As for myself, I was above six years old before I understood any more of French or Perigordic than I did of Arabic;

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and without pains, without book, without grammar or rules, without a whipping and without a tear, I had learnt Latin, and that as pure as my master's own; for I had no chance of corrupting it or mixing it up with anything else. If, for instance, I had a theme set me, as is usual in colleges, they gave it to the others in French, but they had to give it to me in bad Latin to turn into good."

With Greek the father took a different course, but equally removed from the ordinary scholastic fashion. The boy was set to learn that language by means of some sort of game, in which the declensions were moved about like chessmen or counters, or the beads on an abacus, "after the fashion in which some children are taught arithmetic and geometry." This plan was hardly so successful as the other; indeed, the Essayist tells us more than once that he knew nothing of Greek—but he is careful to impress upon us that the fault did not lie with his excellent father, who in this, as in every other point in which the son's character is concerned, "is not to be blamed if he did not reap the fruit correspondent to such admirable culture." The fault lay, he considers, in the first place with "the sterile and unkindly soil," the "heavy, indolent, sleepy" nature of the pupil, which could hardly be roused even to exercise or play. He had, he tells us, "a sluggish wit, that would only go just so far as it was led—a slow apprehension, a feeble invention, and, above all, an incredible defect of memory; from all this it is no wonder if nothing worth having could be extracted." But there was a second reason why the experiment necessarily failed. It was not thoroughly carried out. The father very possibly grew tired of his hobby, and, no doubt, was laughed at by his more

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orthodox friends; at any rate, "he allowed himself to be carried away by popular opinion, which always follows those who go before, like cranes;" and he sent Michel at six years old to the College of Guienne, at Bordeaux, at that time the most flourishing in all France, and containing upwards of two thousand scholars. There he was under the tuition of some of the best scholars of the day: William Guerente, the author of a commentary on Aristotle; Mark Antony Muret, better known under the Latinised form of Muretus, who wrote, perhaps, the purest Latin of any man in modern times; and Dr George Buchanan, one of the most facile and elegant of modern Latin verse-writers, who had attacked the monastic authorities in Scotland before the times were ripe for such reforms, and had to take refuge at Bordeaux in consequence. Montaigne declares that each of these celebrated men confessed to him afterwards that when he first entered the college, they found him so quick and ready with his childish Latin that they were afraid to accost him,—which shows that even great scholars could in those days descend to compliment. Buchanan even told him that, being then tutor to the young Count de Brissac, he was about to compose a treatise on education, and intended to set forth as a pattern the system on which the precocious young Latinist had been brought up.[1]

The father would not even yet wholly give up his peculiar ideas of education; and in entering his son at the college, he stipulated that several regulations should

[1] The Abbé Mangin, so lately as 1818, published a volume called 'L'Education de Montaigne,' recommending the system on which he had been taught Latin.

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be observed in his case which were "contrary to the usages of colleges;" but for all that, says the pupil, "it was college all the same." And of the French colleges of his own day he entertained no high opinion.

"The discipline of most of our colleges has always displeased me. They are veritable jails in which youth is held prisoner. The pupils are made vicious, by being punished before they become so. Pay a visit there when they are at their work; you will hear nothing but cries,—children under execution, and masters drunk with fury. What a mode of creating in these tender and timid souls an appetite for their lessons, to conduct them to their tasks with a furious countenance, rod in hand!—it is an iniquitous and pernicious fashion. How much more becoming it would be to see the class-rooms strewed with leaves and flowers than with blood-stained stumps of birch-rods! I would have painted up there scenes of joy and merriment, Flora and the Graces, as Speusippus had in his school of philosophy: where they are to gain profit, there let them find happiness too. One ought to sweeten for children all food that is wholesome, and put bitter into what is dangerous."—(I. 25.)

He soon lost his familiar knowledge of Latin, he says, at the Guienne College; and though he remained there seven years, by which time he had gone through the whole curriculum, he declares that he reaped no advantage from it, so far as he can reckon. This is the kind of reckless statement which others besides Montaigne, to whom the memories of their school and college days are not agreeable, are very apt to make. We have to correct it, in his case, by what he says himself of his studies. No doubt the severe discipline, and even the ordinary attention to set rules and hours, were utterly distasteful to a boy of his peculiar temperament, and who had been

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brought up at once so tenderly and in such exceptional fashion at home. He tells us that a great deal of what he did learn was learnt out of school-hours. He gained his first taste for reading from the 'Metamorphoses' of Ovid, which he would steal away from his play to devour with all the delight which other boys find in ordinary story-books; and he was fortunate, he confesses, in a wise and judicious tutor (probably Muretus, who was not at that time a professor in the college), who allowed him to follow very much his own tastes in this private reading, but only on condition that the regular college-tasks had been got through. In this fashion he ran through the whole of the 'Æneid' of Virgil, the comedies of Terence and Plautus, and some Italian plays, "attracted entirely by the pleasure of the subject." Had he been unwisely checked in these tastes, he would have carried with him from college, as he believes, "nothing but a hatred of books, as most of our young gentlemen do."

He must also have kept up his knowledge of Latin to a greater extent than he is willing to admit, by taking part in the Latin plays, which were got up with great pains, and with some amount of theatrical decoration, in the college at Bordeaux, as they were at the same date in our own great public schools and universities. Guerente, Buchanan, and Muretus wrote Latin dramas for their pupils to act, as Udall and other head-masters did for Eton and Westminster. The principal of the college, Andrew Govea or Goveanus, was a great encourager of such performances. The young Montaigne had, he says, and we may very readily believe it, considerable natural capacity for acting—"a great command of countenance,

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and flexibility of voice and gesture"—and he played the principal characters in these college theatricals with much applause. It is impossible but that his familiar knowledge of Latin must have been cultivated and improved by such performances.

At the early age of thirteen, then, with such classical and philosophical learning as he had acquired, the young student left college. He now began the special study of law—probably, M. Grün thinks, at Toulouse—but of these next years of his life we can gather but meagre details from any source. He himself makes hardly any allusion to these legal studies: briefly remarking in one passage, that "when he was young he was plunged over head and ears in business, and on the whole succeeded fairly." But his mind was little suited either to the strict rule or the subtle chicaneries of law. In his essay-writing days he speaks with almost bitter contempt of "that fourth estate of wrangling lawyers that is added to the three ancient ones of church, nobles, and people;" he hates lawsuits, and quotes with delight "a young gentleman of good family whom he heard one day very innocently boasting that his mother had lost her suit,—as though it had been a cough, or a fever, or something very disagreeable to keep." He was at Bordeaux during the violent insurrection against the odious *gabelle*—the salt monopoly—in 1548. He seems also to have paid frequent visits to Paris, and to have been admitted to the Court of Henry the Second; for there are many casual allusions in his essays which show a familiarity with Court society, and he gives us some personal reminiscences of the king himself. Whether in Paris or elsewhere, there is no

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question but that he took his full share in all the dissipations of the day, and must have been supplied with pretty ample funds by the indulgence of his father. For nearly the first twenty years of his life, after his childhood, he lived "without any other than casual means, dependent on the will and bounty of others, without settled income or limit of expenditure;" and the only result on his easy and careless disposition was that "he spent his money all the more pleasantly and with less care." He found the purses of his friends always open to him—the more readily, because he was scrupulous in paying his debts. "I never was happier in my life."

Yet in the midst of all this unrestrained self-indulgence there rose at times the *amari aliquid*—the bitterness that is "in the midst of laughter." Here is a reminiscence—set down no doubt honestly in later years, when he was writing on a favourite theme, "That to study philosophy is to learn to die"—which shows that even in those days of licence there was something in Montaigne which ought to have led him to a better use of life.

"There is nothing in which I have more constantly exercised my thoughts than in the idea of death, even in the most licentious season of my youth. In the company of ladies, and at the gaming-table, when people might have fancied me occupied in digesting privately some feeling of jealousy, or the possible disappointment of some hope, I was really thinking of one who had been seized a few days before with a raging fever, ending in death, just as he had left an entertainment of the same kind, with his head full of pleasure, love, and enjoyment, like myself,—and that perhaps the same fate was hanging over me."—(I. 19.)

At some time or other during this earlier period of his

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life he must have seen military service. It is not only that he speaks of the profession of arms as being at once the most pleasant and the most worthy of a gentleman, that he sets forth the delight of the association with young and ardent spirits, the masculine ease and freedom of military society, so free from all ceremony and affectation, the inspiriting strains of martial music, the variety of life in camp and field, the glory and honour of even its sufferings and hardships; but he mentions quite incidentally, as things within his common experience, the dust which he found so disagreeable in the day-time, and the long night-marches which always gave him headache. But when, or where, or under whom he served, remains matter of mere conjecture. The only particulars as to this portion of his life which bear more than a shadow of probability are that he served under Marshal Strozzi, of whose military capacity he tells us he had some opportunity of judging, and that he was present at the siege of Thionville in 1558, when that general lost his life; for he mentions in his journal of travel, many years later, that he had seen the body carried from the field to be buried at Epernay.

But before this latter date his legal studies, slight and desultory as they probably were, had led to some practical result. He had been chosen, probably through family interest, a member of the "Cour des Aides" of the district of Perigord; and subsequently, on its incorporation by royal edict with the "Parliament" of Bordeaux, one of the "counsellors" to this latter and more important body. The position was somewhat equivalent to that of a local magistrate, and Montaigne held the office for

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thirteen years. What were his actual duties at Bordeaux, and how he discharged them, we have very little means of knowing. They could hardly have been very onerous or confining, or he could not have passed so much of his time elsewhere, as he evidently did. Nor could they have been very interesting or attractive to him, if he had that extreme dislike to all kinds of business which he confesses in his later life. Besides this, his mind could never have been in sympathy with the cruelties daily perpetrated in the name of public justice in those days,—notoriously by this very court or "parliament" of Bordeaux; and he could have derived but scanty satisfaction from the dignity of the bench when, as he bitterly complains, "by legalised custom the office of judge is bought and sold, and judgments paid for in ready money, and where justice is legally refused to the man who is unable to pay for it."[1]

He still continued his occasional attendance at Court, and at some time or other was appointed "gentleman of the bed-chamber in ordinary" to the king. We do not wonder, therefore, to find him apparently familiar with Court life under Henry the Second's successor, Francis the Second. He saw there Mary Queen of Scots in all the splendour of her youthful beauty; and she had evidently made a strong impression on the susceptible young Gascon. He speaks of her in his Essays as "that fairest of all queens," and of her execution as an act of "unworthy and barbarous cruelty."[2] He was still in occasional attendance at Court under Charles the Ninth, and was present at Rouen at a curious interview between the king and three American Indians who had been

[1] I. 22. [2] I. 18.

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brought over to France. "Miserable men," he calls them, "to have left their own beautiful climate to come and visit ours!" "They do not foresee," he adds, "how acquaintance with the vices of the Old World will one day cost them their happiness and peace of mind, and that this intercourse will prove their ruin." His Majesty talked to these visitors a long time.

"Some one asked to be informed what, in their opinion, they had found most worthy of notice. They mentioned three things, of which I have forgotten the third, and am very sorry for it; but I can still remember two. They said that, in the first place, they found it very strange that so many tall men wearing beards, strong and well-armed, who were about the king's person (they evidently meant the Swiss guard), should submit to obey the orders of a child,[1] and did not rather choose one of themselves to command them. Secondly (they have a fashion in their own language of calling men the 'halves' of each other), that they had seen among us some men filled and gorged with all sorts of good things, while their 'halves' were begging at their gates, gaunt with hunger and poverty; and thought it strange that these starving 'halves' could endure such injustice, and did not take the others by the throat or set fire to their houses. I talked with one of them a long time, . . . and asked him what advantage he reaped from the rank which he held among his own people (for he was a chief, and our sailors called him king). He told me it was 'to go first in war.' 'What was the number of his followers?' I asked. He marked a space of ground, to signify that it was as many as could be got into that compass—it might be four or five thousand men. 'Did all his authority cease with the war?' He said this much remained to him: 'That whenever he visited the villages within his dependency, they lopped the

[1] Charles IX. was still a minor.

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brambles for him along the paths through the thickets, that he might pass without inconvenience.' This was not such a bad idea; do you ask why? These poor creatures wear no breeches."—(I. 30 *ad fin.*)

For a monarch in that predicament, the lopping of brambles was certainly a more appropriate compliment than the laying down of crimson cloth. Montaigne was just sufficiently tinged with radicalism (learnt, perhaps, from his friend La Boëtie) to enjoy this satire upon kings; but he scarcely foresaw that, two centuries later, the necessitous "halves" in France would act literally upon the idea of the savage chief.[1]

Charles the Ninth bestowed upon Montaigne a distinction which he had long coveted. He made him Chevalier of the Order of St Michel, instituted by Louis XI. It had been formerly a very rare distinction, and had been for this reason an object of ambition to the young courtier; but now, he says, with more cynicism than humility, "Fortune has granted my wish in an amusing way: instead of raising me up and lifting me out of my place to reach it, she has treated me much more graciously; she has cheapened it, and brought it down as low as my shoulders—and lower."[2] Pasquier says that this order had been so lavishly distributed that it had

[1] Montaigne had a man in his service who had lived some years in the Brazils ("Antarctic France," as it was called), and from whom he got a good deal of information. In his essay "On Cannibals" he has given the refrain of a love-song current amongst the natives, which is not without beauty: "Stay, adder, stay, that my sister may draw from thy varied hues the pattern and the work of a rich belt that I may give to my love: so for all time shall thy beauty and thy brilliancy be preferred above all other serpents." Probably these visitors were from the same place.

[2] II. 12.

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come to be called "the collar of all beasts"—probably by the wit of some disappointed aspirant. The bloom had evidently been taken off the honour, in the recipient's eyes, by its having been made so common; but nevertheless it gratified his vanity to some extent. He was certainly fond of parading his chevaliership on all possible occasions.

His little ambition in this point was probably well known to his contemporaries, and gave some occasion for *badinage* to the more fashionable gentlemen of the Court. The Abbé de Brantôme, in one of his volumes, has an unkind cut at the legal gentleman who had turned courtier. "We have all seen," he says, "counsellors who have deserted the courts of parliament, and laid aside the gown and square cap, and aspired to dangle the sword and wear the collar of this Order, without any other pretence of warlike service; as did the Sieur de Montaigne, whose better part it had been to stick to his pen in writing his Essays, than to encumber himself with a sword which he could not manage so well." Montaigne himself was probably not unaware of the existence of this feeling in the circle to which the royal favour had admitted him. "I notice," he says, "in our young courtiers, that they care only for those in their own set, and look upon us country gentlemen as beings of another world, with contempt and pity. But only take them away from their chatter about Court intrigues, and they have not a word to say for themselves." The philosopher of Montaigne must indeed often have found himself out of place in such company. Yet, like a true Frenchman, he loved Paris—unlike as the capital of the sixteenth century was to the Paris of to-day.

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"I never mutiny so far against France but that I still regard Paris with friendly eyes. She has had possession of my heart from my childhood; and it has happened in her case, as it does with all excellent things—the more I have seen since of other fine cities, the more does the beauty of this one win and gain upon my affection. I love her for herself, and better in her ordinary state than when filled with foreign pomp and show: I love her tenderly, even to her very spots and blemishes. I am only a Frenchman through this great city—great in its population, great in the felicitousness of its situation, but great above all and incomparable in the variety and wide range of its advantages —the glory of France, and one of the noblest ornaments of the world. Heaven keep her far from our divisions! So long as she is one and united, I believe her safe from all other violation. I warn her that of all parties, the worst will be that which shall throw her into discord; I fear nothing for her except herself; and I fear for her at least as much as for any other feature of this realm. So long as she is safe, I shall never lack a refuge where to betake myself in the last resort—a retreat which will leave me no regrets for the loss of any other retreat whatever."—(III. 9.)

At the age of thirty-three, by his own account (Dr Payen shows it to have been a year later, and Montaigne is little to be trusted as to dates), he married Francoise, daughter of one of his fellow-counsellors, M. Joseph de la Chassaine. It seems to have been one of those marriages *de convenance* which are and were common enough, and had been arranged by the friends of both. The affections had evidently very little to do with it on the bridegroom's part. He seems hardly to believe at all in what we call marriages "for love." "Men do not marry for themselves," he remarks, "though they may say so; they marry as much or more for posterity—for their family.

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The advantage and interests of marriage touch our families much nearer than ourselves; and therefore it is that I like the custom of having marriages arranged by means of a third party, not by a man's own hand; and by the choice of another rather than that of the party concerned. . . . Might I have had my own way, I would not have married Wisdom herself, if she would have had me: but most of my actions are guided by example, not choice. And yet I did not engage in it of my own voluntary motion: I was led and drawn to it by external considerations. And I was persuaded to it when worse prepared and more backward than I am now that I have tried what it is." With regard to his married life, it was probably that of most French gentlemen of his day. Strict fidelity to his marriage vows was as little to be expected from him as a romantic attachment. We must be content with his own account on this point, which is probably not far from the truth. "As great a libertine as I am taken to be, I have in fact observed the laws of marriage more strictly than I either promised or expected." Indeed he considers himself rather a model husband for those lax times. In the only letter to his wife which has reached us, he begins as follows: "You are very well aware that, according to the rules of these modern days, it does not become a gentleman of fashion to be still courting and caressing his wife. For they say that a sensible man may very well take a wife for himself, but to espouse her is the act of a fool. Let them say what they will; I hold for my part to the simple fashion of old times, as I do in the cut of my beard. Let you and I, my wife, live after the good old French ways." We may assume that

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during the twenty-four years of his married life he treated his wife with the courtesy of a gentleman, for that was in his nature; but he looked upon marriage as a social contract, implying a good deal of forbearance on both sides; and with such a view of the relationship a French lady of those days was, unhappily, too often forced to be content. He considered that occasional absences were desirable in order to keep warm or revive the very calm affection belonging to the marriage state, which he regarded, he says, as "a state of friendship rather than of love." He considered its restraints, however wholesome, to be a very doubtful kind of happiness, though he admits it to be in theory the most perfect estate.

"That so few are found to be happy in it, is a token of its preciousness and value. If it be carefully formed and faithfully accepted, it is the best of all human societies. We cannot live without it; and yet we do nothing but degrade it. The case is the same as with cages; the birds outside are desperate to get in, and those inside are desperate to get out. It is found in these days more convenient for ordinary and plebeian souls, in whose case pleasure, curiosity, and idleness do not so much disturb it; but unruly dispositions such as mine, that hate all kinds of obligation and restraint, are not so well suited for it."—(III. 5.)

He entertained no very high opinion of the fair sex in general, as he confesses: "Good women are not to be found in dozens, as everybody knows, and especially in the duties of married life;" but he never speaks in disparagement of his own wife, or of his own married happiness, unless in one or two doubtful passages, where he speaks of "those everyday annoyances which are

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never light, which are perpetual and irremediable, especially when they spring from the members of our own family," and especially of "the neat well-made shoe" of which none knows the pinching but the wearer. A note found in his own handwriting records that once, in consequence of some domestic quarrel, he sat down and wrote an essay "On Anger;" but he adds that this was the first and only time that his wife furnished him with a subject; which, in such a satirical moralist, shows perhaps a certain amount of forbearance. That he was not wanting in such attentions as were due from a polished and kind-hearted gentleman may be gathered from one little story told by him. One of his grooms, mounted upon an unruly horse, had charged violently against the slighter animal which Montaigne was riding, and knocked them both, as he describes it, "over and over." He was stunned by the fall; and as he was being carried to his chateau, which was about a league off, his wife, who had heard of the accident, ran to meet him. The road was rough and steep; and his first words (as he was afterwards told), on partially recovering consciousness, were to order her to be mounted on a horse at once, to save her from needless fatigue.

Montaigne and his wife had been four years married when their first child was born—a daughter. She died in her second year, while the father was absent in Paris. He wrote to his wife on this occasion a brief letter, kindly but cold (the opening words of which have been just quoted), and sent her a copy of his friend La Boëtie's translation of Plutarch's "Letter of Consolation to his Wife"—a fashion of condolence highly characteristic of the man. He lost altogether, he tells us, "two

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or three children"—his fatherly feelings do not prompt him to strict accuracy—"while at nurse, and bore their loss, if not without grief, at least without repining." The only child who survived him was a daughter, Leonore, who married during his lifetime, and to one of whose grandchildren the estate and chateau of Montaigne descended. He speaks little of her—garrulous in all that concerns himself personally, he is singularly reticent as to his domestic relations—but he seems to have been gentle and easy-natured in the parental relationship, as in others. His theories of education were sound and sensible, as we shall see hereafter in the very remarkable essay on the subject which he has thrown into the form of a letter to Madame de Foix. But he had no sons of his own in whose training he could carry out his principles, and his daughter's education seems to have been left, naturally enough, very much in the hands of her governess.

His affections were warmer, or at least more strongly expressed, in the matter of friendship. He had formed an acquaintance in his earlier life at Bordeaux with Stephen de la Boëtie, one of his "fellow-counsellors of parliament," a young man of high abilities and amiable character, who had published at a very early age[1] a passionate essay on Republicanism which was largely circulated by a party in France with the view of exciting a revolution, and which charmed Montaigne, though in a literary rather than a political point of view. This effort of youthful genius had inspired him

[1] Montaigne in his early editions says at eighteen: this he afterwards corrected to sixteen. Mr Bayle St John considers him to have been nineteen at the least.

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with a longing to make the young writer's acquaintance—a longing reciprocated, as it appears, by La Boëtie himself. They met at last by chance; and from that time forth their friendship was, he says, "so perfect and unbroken, that indeed one hardly reads anywhere of the like, and amongst the men of this age there is no trace of any relationship of the kind."[1] The friends, as is often the case in such attachments, were very unlike in many things; and La Boëtie's seems to have been much the higher character. Montaigne says that if he were asked why he loved him, he could only make this answer, "Because it was he—because it was I." This almost romantic intercourse lasted only four years. La Boëtie died at the early age of thirty-two, cut off in the very opening of a life which seems to have been of the highest promise. His friend alludes to this in one of his finest passages. There can be no question of its reference to La Boëtie, though he does not here mention him by name:—

"There are deaths which are brave and fortunate. I have seen the thread of life cut asunder in a career of marvellous progress, and in the very flower of its increase, in the case of one whose end was so splendid, that to my thinking his ambitious and noble aims had nothing in them so grand as their sudden interruption. He arrived at the goal which he had in view with greater dignity and glory than his desires or his hopes could have aspired to, and won beforehand, in his fall, that power and reputation which he aimed at in his course."—(I. 18 *ad fin.*)

Montaigne had the sad consolation of watching affectionately the last few suffering days of La Boëtie's life, and

[1] I. 27.

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of knowing that his presence was one of the sufferer's greatest comforts. "Brother," said the dying man, "keep close to me, if you please." The letter in which Montaigne, writing to his own father, gives the details of La Boëtie's last hours, is of the highest interest from its simple and yet eloquent pathos, and would of itself redeem the character of the writer from any charge of insensibility or want of sincerity, where his affections were really engaged.

The memory of that remarkable friendship remained fresh with him during all his remaining life. Nine years afterwards he thus writes of it:—

"If I compare all the rest of my life—though, thank God! I have always passed my time pleasantly enough, and at my ease—with the four years during which it was given me to enjoy the charming society of that admirable man, 'tis nothing but smoke—a dark and cheerless night. From the day I lost him, I do but drag on a languishing existence; and the very pleasures which offer themselves to me, far from ministering consolation, do but double my regret for his loss. We were halves in everything; it seems to me now as though I were robbing him of his share. I was so formed and accustomed to be his second in all things, that I seem now to be only half myself."—(I. 27 *ad fin.*)

And again:—

"I know myself, from too sure experience, that there is no consolation so sweet under the loss of our friends, as that which arises from the consciousness of having had no reserves with them, of having maintained with them a perfect and entire communion of thought. O my lost friend! am I the better for feeling this, or am I the worse? I am surely much the better. Sorrow for his loss is at once my comfort and my honour."—(II. 8.)

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Even eighteen years after La Boëtie's death, the writer still cherished a loving memory of their friendship. He was writing a letter (as he tells us in the journal of his travels) to another friend, Cardinal d'Ossat, when something brought La Boëtie into his thoughts, and quite unhinged him for the time.

He formed another close attachment somewhat later in life; but this was of an almost paternal character, and with a lady—Marie de Gournay le Jars, of a good old Picard family, now living in retirement with her widowed mother. In this case, his first attraction undoubtedly was the strong admiration which this young student of nineteen, who could read Latin and Greek, had expressed for his Essays. It was not until some few years afterwards that he made her personal acquaintance, when she came with her mother to Paris for that special purpose. She was then twenty-two, and he was fifty-five. How far the romantic attachment which he then conceived for her sprang from the gratified vanity of the author, or how far it was due to something specially charming in Mademoiselle Marie herself, it is now impossible to say. He adopted her at once as a kind of daughter—his *fille d'alliance*, as he henceforth terms her: he loved her, as he declares, "with a more than paternal love;" and she professes herself "glorified and made blessed by the title." She was as proud of it, she says, "as if she had been the mother of the Muses." He repaid these flatteries, if flatteries they were, by the following notice of her inserted in the next edition of his Essays:—

"I love her more than anything in the world. If youth can give any presage of the future, that soul will one day be

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capable of the highest things, and amongst others, of the perfection of that holiest form of friendship to which we do not read of her sex having as yet attained. The sincerity and solidity of her character already suffice for this; her affection for me is unbounded. . . . The judgment which she formed of my first essays—a woman, and in such times as these, and so young, and the only person in her neighbourhood who did so—and the well-known ardour of the affection she conceived for me, and her desire of a long time to make my acquaintance, merely on the estimate she had formed of me before she had ever seen me, are circumstances very remarkable."—(II. 17 *ad fin.*)

They were at least very pleasant to a writer who, whatever he may sometimes affect to say, had a very natural desire to be appreciated, and had begun to complain to himself that a prophet had no honour in his own country. Mdlle. de Gournay herself, in the preface to the edition of the Essays which she inscribed to Cardinal Richelieu in 1635, speaks of the "cold reception" accorded to the work by the "vulgar;" and consoles herself and the author by the old saying that praise, to be worth having, must come from the praiseworthy. She had before predicted, with what was at least a happy intuition, that it would require another century to raise her favourite author to his due place in the estimation of general readers. The compliments she paid him were assuredly full-flavoured enough to suit the strongest palate. She speaks of his works as "the quintessence of all true philosophy, the judicial throne of reason, the antidote to folly, the emancipation of the intellect, the resurrection of moral and human truth" —in short, she proceeds to add—"second only to the gospel." Montaigne paid more than one visit, after the

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interview in Paris, to Marie and her mother at their country-house at Gournay-sur-Aronde. His fair *protégée*, though she published afterwards a romance on her own account, dedicated of course to her "father," M. de Montaigne, was more happy as a critic than as an authoress. The romance is a love-story of the ultra-romantic type; but in her own life there was no such element. She died unmarried, in her eightieth year, after spending much time and money in the vain pursuit of the "philosopher's stone," and bestowed her later affections on a maid-servant and a cat.

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CHAPTER II.

THE ESSAYIST IN HIS LIBRARY.

We must return to trace the Essayist in his literary life. The year after his marriage saw his first effort as an author—or rather, in this case, a translator. One of the many literary friends whom his father had been in the habit of entertaining had made him a present of a book with a not very attractive title—the '*Theologia Naturalis*' of Master Raymond de Sebond or Sebeyde (the name is variously written), a Spaniard who professed theology, philosophy, and medicine at Toulouse more than a hundred years before. The book was not the more attractive to a man like Pierre Montaigne (who, as his son assures us, was no great scholar) that it was written in "a sort of jargon of Spanish with Latin terminations;" but the donor had thought, as his host knew something of Spanish and Italian, he might, "with a little help," be able to master it. M. de Montaigne had done with it what is very commonly done with such presents—had laid it aside and forgotten it. But some little time before his death he found it under a heap of other neglected papers, and "commanded" his son to translate it for him into French. "It was a business

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very strange and novel for me; but being at leisure at that time, as it happened, and unable to refuse any command of the best father that ever was, I set to work at it as well as I could. He was very much pleased with it, and charged me to have it printed, which was done after his death."[1] This work, together with Montaigne's defence of the writer's views, will come under our notice hereafter. Two years later, he gave to the press some of the literary remains of his lost friend La Boëtie.

Three years after his marriage he succeeded on his father's death to the family estate of Montaigne, his two elder brothers having died before, and the other lands of the Eyquems having been portioned off, as it would seem, to the younger and surviving brothers. His father had prognosticated that he would ruin the place, thinking him so ill fitted for a country life; "but he was mistaken," says the son with pardonable complacency: "here I am still, in as good a position as when I succeeded to it, if not a little better." In this old house where he was born he proposed to himself to lead from thenceforth a life of quiet retirement; and, with the exception of some eighteen months spent in foreign travel, he carried out the resolution embodied in a Latin inscription still partially legible on the walls of his cabinet.

"In the year of Christ 1571, at the age of thirty-eight, on the last day of February, being his birthday, Michel de Montaigne, long weary of the bondage of Court and of public employment, hath withdrawn himself, while yet in the vigour of life, into the bosom of the learned Virgins, where in quiet, and free from all cares, he may

[1] II. 12.

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pass, if the fates permit, what little shall yet remain of a course which has been in great part already run. This his ancestral seat and pleasant retiring-place he has consecrated to liberty, tranquillity, and leisure."[1]

The chateau of St Michel de Montaigne, as it is called, has been often enough described. It stands in the valley of the Dordogne, in the very heart of the wine-country of Bordeaux, three miles from the little town of Castillon, under whose walls Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, and his son were killed in 1453. It is one of those picturesque French country-houses—half fortress and half mansion — built of grey stone, with thick walls and yet roomy apartments, and dating from some time in the fourteenth century. But the quarter of the building specially associated with the author of the Essays is the larger round tower which commands the entrance, and remains to this day, allowing for the ravages of time and long neglect, very much in the state in which he left it. It was "respected, or rather abandoned," says Dr Payen, by later occupants of the chateau; but this was a fate far more desirable than that it should have been subjected to modern improvement.[2] It consists of three storeys, including the basement, which served as a domestic chapel—used also, it is possible, by the tenantry on the estate. To this no

[1] The latest and probably most correct copy of the original inscription was made by MM. Galy and Lapeyre in 1861, and runs thus: "An. Chr. [illegible] æt. xxxviii. Pridie Kal. Mart. die suo natali Mich. Montanus servitii Aulici et munerum publicorum jam dum pertæsus, dum se integer (?) in doctarum Virginum recepit sinus ubi quietus et omnium securus quantillum id tandem superabit decursi multa jam parte spatii si modo fata duint exigat istas sedes dulcesque latebras avitasque libertati suæ tranquillitatique et otio consecravit."

[2] The chateau was restored in 1861 by M. Magne.

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doubt belonged the great bell which, as Montaigne tells us, "rang out every morning and evening the 'Ave Maria,' the noise of which shook the very tower," and which, at first, "seemed to him intolerable."[1] The first floor (or as he himself calls it, the second) consists of the large circular room which formed his bed-chamber, with a small square dressing-room attached. Above the bed-chamber was his library, and opening from it the little room which he calls his cabinet. These apartments no one can describe so well as himself.

"From my library I command at once my whole establishment. I enter it, and see below me my garden, my court, my farmyard, and nearly all quarters of my premises. Then I turn over the pages now of one book, and now of another, without order or method, in disconnected snatches. At one time I meditate, at another I make notes, and dictate such fancies as you have here. 'Tis the third storey of a tower. The first is my chapel; the second is a bed-chamber and its dependencies, where I often lie for the sake of being alone. Above this is a large room, which was formerly the most useless part of the house. Here I pass most of the days of my life, and most of the hours of the day: I am never there at night. Connected with it is a cabinet, handsome enough, capable of holding a fire in the winter, with windows very pleasantly arranged. And if it were not that I dreaded the trouble quite as much as the expense—the trouble that deters me from all business—I might easily run out on either side a gallery a hundred paces long and full twelve wide: since I find the walls ready built, for another purpose, to the height that would be required. Every place of retirement requires a promenade. My thoughts go to sleep if I sit down. My mind cannot walk alone—it is as though the legs set it moving. All who study without a book feel the same. The shape of this room is circular, and there is no

[1] I. 22.

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flat wall except enough for my table and chair, and its curves present to me at one view all my books, ranged in five rows of standing presses all round me. It has three windows, with fine and extensive views, and is sixteen paces in diameter. In winter time I am not there so continually; for my house, as its name implies, stands on an eminence, and there is no part of it more exposed to the wind than this. I like it because it is a little difficult of access and out of the way, both for the sake of the exercise, and because it withdraws me from the interruption of others. There is my stronghold: I try to make my dominion over it absolute, and to secure this one corner free from all companionship—conjugal, filial, or social. Everywhere else my authority is but nominal; in reality, of but a confused kind. Wretched is he, to my thinking, who has no place in his own house where he can be by himself,—where he can attend to himself only,—where he can hide himself. Ambition pays off her votaries handsomely by keeping them always on view, like a statue in the market-place—'*Magna servitus est magna fortuna.*'[1] I consider nothing so irksome in the austerity of life which our religious orders affect, as what I have observed in some of their brotherhoods, as one of their rules, the insisting on the companionship of another at all times and places, and the presence of witnesses on every occasion whatever; and I find it much more endurable to be always alone than never to be so."[2]

This is the laboratory in which the Essays were produced, and its somewhat fantastic decorations, which can still be sufficiently traced, are highly characteristic of the author. Over the place once occupied by his chair and table may still be traced (according to the accounts of modern visitors) his family arms fully emblazoned, with the collar of the Order of St Michel, of which he

[1] "A great position is great bondage."—(Seneca.)
[2] III. 3.

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was so proud, depicted in "gigantesque" proportions.[1] The rafters and the two cross-beams of the open roof are covered with inscriptions painted in black letters (not carved, as has been said), which are, or at least were in 1861, still tolerably legible, though an unskilful attempt at restoration has in some cases introduced blunders. These inscriptions are sentences chosen from the wisdom of the ancients as it most commended itself to the mind of Montaigne. The books of Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiasticus, the Epistles of St Paul, Sextus Empiricus and Stobæus (from whose pages he got fragments of Socrates, Euripides, and Sophocles), contribute the majority of the fifty-four mottoes which embody his philosophy. There appears no affectation in this selection. The sentences are in themselves the key-note of the Essays in their more serious vein. The vanity of all human wisdom, and the uncertainty of all human belief—this is the tenor, more or less, of every text inscribed there,—Jewish, Christian, or Pagan. They are mostly in Latin, some few in Greek; but it will be sufficient here to give some of the most characteristic in an English version. We find the warning of Isaiah (v. 21), "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes," and of Solomon (Prov. xxvi. 12), repeated in St Paul's "Be not wise in your own conceits," and, "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." There is the lament of the Preacher—"All is vanity," and his bitter protest of unsatisfied longing — "The desire of knowledge hath God given to the sons of men for them to be tormented with," side by side with the words of Horace the Epicurean—"Why vex thy spirit

[1] 'Montaigne chez lui;' MM. Galy et Lapeyre: 1861.

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with an eternal wisdom for which it is too feeble?" and the cry of the materialist Lucretius—"Alas for the wretched minds and the blind hearts of men!" We have from Pliny the conclusion that "The only certainty is that there is nothing certain, and there is nothing at once so wretched and so conceited as man."[1] The scepticism which, as we shall see, Montaigne applied to everything, is embodied in the brief quotations from the famous Pyrrhonist Sextus Empiricus,—"I determine nothing,"—"It may be or it may not be;" as well as in the well-known fragment of Euripides—

> "Who knows but this which we call death, be life,
> And this our life be death?"

In somewhat larger characters, on the centre beam,—"I do not understand"—"I hesitate"—"I examine." Almost the only sentence which reflects the more cheerful and genial side of the Essayist, and which he had assuredly the best right to adopt, is the grand line which Terence puts into the mouth of one of his characters in "The Self-tormentor"—

> "I am a man, and all things human touch me."

The last in order of this series of mottoes is that which he perhaps intended should sum up his practical rule of life,—"The final wisdom of man is to make the best of things as they are, and for what remains, to face it with confidence." The reference given at the end is to Ecclesiastes; but it seems a somewhat liberal version of his own. But the inscriptions (that is to say, those in Latin, for the Greek he did not trust himself to meddle

[1] Nat. Hist. II. 7.

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with) appear to have been frequently changed, or their wording altered, at the fancy of Montaigne himself; here and there the original sentences, with their references, may still be traced under the new, and, as has been said, the attempt at restoration has sometimes led to inaccuracy.[1]

The walls of the cabinet adjoining this library were once covered with large fresco-paintings of subjects from classical legends, executed apparently under the direction of Montaigne himself. At the beginning of one of his essays he jestingly compares his own work to that of the painter.

"While observing the method of working in a painter whom I employ, I am seized with a desire to imitate it. He selects the best place—the middle of each panel—to execute there a picture finished with all his skill, and the unoccupied space all round he fills in with grotesques—fantastic designs, whose only grace lies in their variety and quaintness. What are these writings of mine, in truth, but grotesques and monstrosities, pieced together out of divers members, with no distinct shape, having neither order, nor sequence, nor proportion, except accidentally?

'The woman's bust ends in a fish below.'[2]

I get on very well, like my painter, so far as the second half goes, but I fall short in the other and better part; for my confidence in my own powers does not go so far as to venture upon undertaking a grand picture, highly finished and conformed to the rules of art."—(I. 27.)

It is quite impossible to predicate of any author

[1] The motto which he afterwards adopted—"*Que scay-je?*" "What do I know?" with the emblem of a balance, so briefly expressive of the sum of his belief, is not among these inscriptions. It appears for the first time on the title-page of the Essays in the edition of 1659.

[2] Hor., De Art. Poet. 4.

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what were his true motives for writing or publishing; certainly it would seldom be safe to receive implicitly those alleged by the author himself. We all know what these are, in so many cases. The flattering importunity of friends; the desire to fill up some hiatus in literature; the command of some royal or noble patron; the enforced leisure and tedium of a sick-room. So many writers seem to feel, and in many cases with sufficient reason, that their appearance in the field of literature needs some apology. Few have the boldness to announce, like Thucydides, that they are presenting the world "with a possession for ever:" and few are prepared to adopt the ironical apology of the Roman satirist, and say that they have as much right to spoil good paper as any one else.[1] In truth, spite of the professional thunders of critics, it is hard to see why the man who prints and publishes (unless under the detestable form of subscription copies) should be bound to make any apology at all, and those authors are wisest who do not attempt it. Their work will be generally appreciated at its true value, either now or hereafter, if it be worth anything: and if not, the abyss of forgotten books is still wide enough to contain it.

The case of Montaigne is no exception. He is full, not exactly of apologies, but of explanations of his motives and objects in sitting down to write. We may trust them just as much, or as little, as similar professions from the pens of authors generally. There is in his case the additional difficulty that he makes so many, and that they do not agree. Let us take, to begin with, the preface to the Essays themselves.

[1] Juvenal, Sat. I. 18.

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"Here, reader, is a book written in all good faith. It warns thee at the outset, that I have proposed to myself no end but a family and private one; I had in it no thought of thy profit or of my own glory: my powers are not capable of such an undertaking. I have dedicated it to the special convenience of my relations and friends; in order that when they have lost me (which they needs must do very soon) they may here recover some traits of my character and humour, and that by this means they may preserve more perfect and lively the knowledge which they had of me in life. Had it been my object to seek the favour of the public, I would have decked myself out in borrowed finery: I prefer to be seen in my own simple, natural, and ordinary garb, without study or artifice; for it is myself that I am painting. My defects will be read here to the life, my imperfections and my natural shape, so far as respect for the public has allowed me to depict them. Had I been born among those nations who are said still to live under the sweet liberty of the first laws of nature, I assure thee that I would most willingly have painted myself at full length and stark naked. Thus, reader, I myself am the subject-matter of my book; there is no reason why thou shouldest employ thy leisure on a subject so vain and frivolous. Adieu, then."

Thoroughly characteristic as this preface is both in style and thought—and, easily as the phrases flow, he had evidently bestowed great pains upon it—the "good faith" which he claims, not without fair reason, for his self-revelations in his book is hardly the distinctive quality of this address to his reader. He says he wrote simply for his family and friends. Apparently he would have us look upon the author as sitting to himself for his literary portrait, homely but faithful, of which his friends would be glad to have copies, out of a pious love to the original; and that if any stranger should get hold of a copy of such a very uninteresting family picture, the best

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thing for him to do would be to put it down at once. If such a thought were at all in accordance with the author's character, it would nevertheless be wholly inconsistent with what he says elsewhere. He writes, he tells us sometimes, because he had nothing better to do; he finds that his mind, in his retirement, "begets so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after another, without order or design, that to be able to contemplate their folly and absurdity at his ease, he has begun to set them down in writing, in the hope, with time, of making them ashamed of themselves:"[1] he has taken upon himself to record his faults from time to time, in the hope that he may thus learn to amend them: or he hopes that others may see his errors, and so avoid the like for themselves —"the service which good men do the world by making themselves imitated, I perchance may do by making myself avoided; by my publishing and arraigning my faults, another may perhaps learn to dread them."[2] He professes an indifference to literary fame; but at the same time he cannot conclude an essay "On the love of fathers towards their children" without dwelling at some length, and very happily, on the analogous affection which an author feels for his literary progeny.

"It appears to me that there is another kind of production which springs from us, which ought to recommend itself to us in no less degree. What we beget with our mind—the progeny of our intellect, our enterprise, and our abilities—springs from a far nobler part of us than our body, and is more truly our own. In such births we are at once father and mother: these cost us much dearer, and bring us more honour, if they have anything good in them at all. For the

[1] I. 8. [2] III. 8.

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work of other children is much more theirs than ours: what share we have in it is very slight; but of these last all the beauty, all the grace, all the value is our own. Thus they represent us, and recall us to men's memory, in a far more lively fashion than the others."

He goes on to illustrate his position by examples, gathered from his favourite ancients, of authors who could not survive the loss of their works; concluding with the instance of the poet Lucan, who, when he was bleeding to death by the sentence of "that scoundrel Nero," repeated with his last breath some verses from his 'Pharsalia;' and he asks—"What was this but a tender and paternal leave which he was taking of his children, resembling the farewell blessings and the loving embraces which we bestow on ours when we die; a result of that natural feeling which suggests to our remembrance, in that last extremity, the objects which we have held dearest during our life?" He considers it would have been almost "impious" in St Augustine, "had the choice been given him of burying his writings, from which religion has received such great advantage, or of burying his children (supposing him to have had any), if he had not preferred to bury the children. And I am not sure," he continues, "that I had not rather have been the father of a perfectly well-formed child by the Muses than by my wife: and to this literary child of mine, such as it is, I give what I have to give absolutely and irrevocably, as one gives to the children of one's body."[1]

These are not the words of one who undervalues literary work, or who is indifferent to his own reputation as an author, or who is merely jotting down carelessly some

[1] II. 8

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personal recollections for the amusement of a few friends. Montaigne wrote, no doubt, because it was an occupation in which he delighted, and because he felt that he had something original to say, and which a good many people would find worth reading. He wrote in a desultory, free-and-easy style, without method or order, because it suited his peculiar genius and his unmethodical mind. But he was very anxious to let his friends and readers know that he, Michel Eyquem, Seigneur de Montaigne, gentleman-in-waiting in ordinary to His Most Christian Majesty, Chevalier of the Order of St Michel, was not an author by profession; that he was writing for his own pleasure, or say to amuse a few discerning friends, not for fame or for profit. Hear what he says in a kind of supplementary dedication, in the shape of a letter to Madame de Duras, by way of *envoi* to his second Book of Essays.

"I am less a writer of books than of anything. I have sought information for the sake of my own present essential advantage, not in order to lay up a stock of it and keep it for my heirs. He that has anything of value in him, let him make it appear in his character, in his conversation, in his behaviour, in love-affairs or in quarrels—at play, in bed, at table, in the management of his affairs, in his domestic economy. The men whom I see making clever books in bad shoes and stockings, should have mended their shoes and stockings first, if they would have listened to me. Ask a Spartan whether he had rather be a good rhetorician or a good soldier! For my own part, I had rather be a good cook, if I had not already one to suit me. Good heavens, madam! how I should hate the reputation of being a clever fellow with my pen, and a nincompoop and a fool in everything else! Yet I had rather be a fool here and there, than have made such a bad choice in employing my talents."

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He tells a story elsewhere of two grave-looking gentlemen whom he met one day riding on the road, followed at a little distance by the Count de Rochefoucauld and his retinue. "One of my people asked the foremost of these two Dominies who that gentleman was who was coming behind him? He, not having observed the company that was following, and thinking the man meant his fellow-traveller, answered, amusingly, 'He is not a gentleman—he is a grammarian, and I am a logician.'" Montaigne in this letter reverses his own story. He would have Madame de Duras understand that he is distinctly a gentleman,—not a scholar or an author: a man of mind, but also a man of the world, well able to play his part at Court and in good society: these idle fancies of his, which he puts on paper, and which "may happen at some time or other to fall into her ladyship's hands," are only the amusement of a gentleman's leisure hours. It is a kind of affectation common enough in former days. Horace Walpole (who has not a little in common with Montaigne) always disclaims the idea of being anything so vulgar as a man of letters. And St Simon, great writer as he is, speaks with the utmost contempt of the "gentlemen of the pen."

Yet in the same letter Montaigne shows himself far from careless as to what the world would think of his performance. If he is indifferent to posthumous fame, and "has no ambition that any one should love and esteem him more when dead than while living," it is because his common-sense leads him to prefer that he should win his place in literature while he can yet enjoy it.

"If I were one of those to whom the world could possibly owe any praise, I would cry quits for the half of it on con-

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dition it were paid me in advance: let it make haste and gather all round me, more thick than lasting, rather abundant than durable: and let it pass away, with my full leave, when my perception of it shall have ceased too, and when its sweet sound can no longer reach my ears. It were an idle fancy, at the time when I am ready to give up my intercourse with mankind, to seek to present myself to them with new recommendations."

His style and subject were also an intentional protest against the artificial and stilted literature of the day. He would make some attempt to fill the gap which lay between printed books and clever conversation. His book should not be a book at all, in the ordinary sense: and therefore it is that he constantly disclaims the status of an author, and claims at the same time a special exemption from the critical judgment to which the author is held responsible.

"When I take up subjects of a popular and lively character, it is to suit my own fancy, since I do not affect a formal and gloomy wisdom as the world does. . . . I see better than any one else that mine are but the idle reveries of one who has done no more than nibble at the outside crust of learning in his youth, and has retained of it only a vague and blurred image—a little of everything, and nothing complete, in true French fashion. . . . Were these Essays of mine worthy of criticism, it might be found, I fancy, that they would hardly please common and vulgar minds, and hardly those that are singularly eminent: the first would not understand them sufficiently, and the second would understand them too seriously; they might live, perhaps, in some middle region." —(I. 54 *ad fin.*)

It was in accordance with his character generally that he would have felt flattered by a somewhat more ready appreciation from his friends and neighbours. He was

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somewhat chagrined to find in his own case the verification of the proverb that no man is a prophet in his own country. "In my own neighbourhood in Gascony, they look upon it as rather droll to see me in print. The farther off from my own home that people make acquaintance with my book, the more I am thought of. In Guienne I have to buy printers: elsewhere they buy me."[1] He hardly knows whether to feel more flattered by the appreciation of strangers, or disappointed at the want of it amongst those who know him well. And it is this which draws from him the remark which, like so many of his original points, has been shaped into a proverb of which the authorship has been given to others: "More than one man has been a wonder to the world, in whom his wife or his valet saw nothing even remarkable: few men have been admired by their domestic servants."[2]

He has no objection to let us know that possibly he might have succeeded in a more serious and ambitious line of writing—if he had thought it worth his while. Very early in his book he tells us that some friends had urged him to write the history of his own times. They had thought, he says (and in this they were certainly not far wrong), that he was less blinded than most people by prejudice or partiality, and that he had enjoyed special

[1] III. 2.

[2] "One must be a great hero, to be such in the eyes of one's *valet-de-chambre;*" variously attributed to Marshal Catinat, Madame de Sévigné, and Madame Cornuel. But the original idea seems to lie in a passage which Montaigne elsewhere quotes (I. 12.) from Plutarch's treatise on "Isis and Osiris," where Antigonus, having been called by a poet a god, and the offspring of the Sun, is made to reply, "Now my chamber-servant is not aware of this."

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opportunities of intercourse with the heads of both the great factions which had so long distracted France. They did not consider, he says, that "not for the glory of Sallust" would he have addressed himself to a work requiring method, attention, and perseverance, to all which he was a sworn enemy: and although there is no question but that such memoirs from his pen would have been charming to read, they would probably have been disjointed, incomplete, and untrustworthy. Another line in which his friends "thought he could do something" was as a writer of letters. No doubt he could do this excellently well, as many of his existing letters show; and he confesses that he "would willingly have adopted this form of publishing his fancies if he had had any one to write to." And here he missed so much, he says, the one friend he had so early lost. As for fictitious correspondents, he did not like that kind of literary deception. "I should have been more careful and more sure of my ground had I been addressing some one able and friendly correspondent, than in thus having to pay regard to the varying countenance of the public; and I am mistaken if I should not have succeeded better. I have naturally a sportive and familiar style; but it is a style of my own, useless for public business; like my talk, in every way —too angular, disjointed, abrupt, peculiar to myself." It seems very likely that he had at one time some idea of following out this second suggestion; for out of the little more than a thousand volumes which formed his library, above a hundred were collections of published letters. But the age of professed letter-writing was yet to come, and the reading world has no reason to complain that he took his own individual line, and worked

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after his own fashion. We could ill have lost Montaigne as he is, even to have gained a Sully or a Horace Walpole.

It was in the library just described, containing one of the best collections of books to be found at that time, as the owner thinks, in any country-house (many of the volumes a legacy from his friend Stephen La Boëtie), that Montaigne began the literary employment of his life, "in a wild country, where no one could assist him," where he had scarcely a single neighbour "who understood the Latin of his Paternoster." "I might have done it better elsewhere," he says, "but then the work would not have been so much my own." He describes his method (if method it could be called) of study and work in various passages scattered here and there through his pages.

"This fagoting-up of so many different pieces is done in this fashion: I never put my hand to it but when too much idle leisure urges me, and never anywhere but at home. So that it is built up by irregular starts and at intervals, inasmuch as business sometimes calls me elsewhere for many months."—(II. 37.)

He paced about the room which he has described, taking down a volume here and there as suited the fancy of the hour—"I turn over books," he says, "I do not study them"—and dictating occasionally from time to time to the servant who acted as his amanuensis, and whom he accuses of having stolen from him some of his best pieces. (One would very much like to know what became of this plunder, and whether the thief turned publisher on his own account.) He found a great drawback in the badness of his memory, of which he com-

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plains repeatedly. But here, as in some other criticisms upon himself, we cannot help suspecting a little half-earnest exaggeration.

"My mind displeases me in this, that it commonly gives birth to my profoundest reveries, or my most fanciful conceits, and those which please me best, quite unexpectedly, and when I am least in search of them; and these vanish on a sudden when I have no means at the moment of securing them—on horseback, at table, or in bed, but more especially on horseback, when I indulge most largely in meditation. . . . So, of the fancies which come into my head thus casually, I retain in my memory only a vague idea, just enough to make me torment and plague myself, all to no purpose, in trying to recall them."—(II. 5.)

"If anything comes into my head that I want to look for in my library, or to write down, I am obliged to give it in charge to some one else, for fear lest it should escape me in merely crossing my courtyard. . . . What I retain from my reading, I do not recognise afterwards as another's—author, context, words, and every other particular I immediately forget; and I am so excellent at forgetting, that even my own writings and compositions I forget no less than other things."—(II. 17.)

And he expresses a fear lest this infirmity of memory should often lead him to repeat himself.

What volumes were most often in his hands he lets us know in the essay "On Books," as well as in scattered notices elsewhere. They were the great classical authors of old Rome, which he read with ease in the original. "I am not much taken with new books, for the old seem to me fuller and more solid: nor with the Greek, because my judgment cannot do its work there, with my imperfect and prentice-like knowledge of the language." As to his general tastes, he says he cares to

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read "no books but such as are easy and pleasant, and amuse his fancy, or such as can console him, and teach him how to order his life and death." We have seen how early he made acquaintance with the Æneid of Virgil, and he had then also been delighted with "good old Ovid;" but, as his taste matured, "the facility and ready invention that had so charmed him" in that poet had lost their attraction. Virgil, Lucretius, Catullus, and Horace, he ranks "by many degrees" above the rest of the Latin poets. He also loves Lucan.

"As to that charming Terence, the embodiment of all that is delicious and graceful in the Latin tongue, I find him represent the emotions of the mind and the phases of character to the life, in the most admirable way: every moment our modern life sends me back to his pages; I can never read him but I discover some new grace and beauty."

Seneca and Plutarch (which last he had read in Jacques Amyot's translation, published not long before) were his favourite writers, to whom he recurred again and again. He not only quotes them largely, but has given a special essay to a critical comparison of the two.

"I never set myself in earnest to deal with any solid writers, save Plutarch and Seneca; from these two I draw like the daughters of Danaus, filling and pouring out continually: some little of it I can make stick to this paper, but to myself hardly anything at all."—(I. 25.)

In one passage he asserts that while engaged in actual composition he avoided reference to books, and wrote rather from his previously digested reading:—

"When I am writing, I am well content to be without the companionship or the recollection of books, for fear lest they should interfere with my own style: besides, in truth, good

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authors humble me too much, and daunt my courage. I willingly follow the example of the painter, who because he painted cocks so wretchedly, forbade his apprentices to allow any real cock to enter his premises."—(III. 5.)

He makes exception, indeed, as to one author :—

"But I can hardly do without Plutarch; he is so universal and so full, that on all occasions and whatever out-of-the-way subject you are dealing with, he introduces himself into your business, and holds out to you a liberal and inexhaustible hand, full of rich illustrations. I am angry at seeing him so continually exposed to pillage by those who handle him; I cannot cast an eye on him myself, but I steal a leg or a wing."

This professed independence of books is one of the instances in which the writer, so communicative as to his own habits, does not always keep to the same story: since, in his essay on "Pedantry," after an attack on those who go on picking knowledge out of various authors only to retail it again, he confesses that his own system was too much the same :—

"It is marvellous how properly this folly might defend itself by my own example; for am I not doing the very same thing in the greater part of this medley of mine? I go about culling here and there from different books the passages which please me most, not to keep them (for I have no memory to keep them in), but to transplant them here; where, in point of fact, they are no more mine than they were in their original place."

The philosophical works of Cicero, and his Letters to Atticus; Cæsar, Sallust, Livy—with all these he was sufficiently familiar to speak with a pertinent criticism, though he declares that Tacitus was the only writer whose works he had read through. His love for the

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classics was remarkable. It was very well for Scaliger to call him "a bold ignoramus;" he was no great scholar, and made no such pretension; he made occasional blunders: but few professed scholars have done so much to make the great thoughts of antiquity a living reality for unlearned readers. The French historians, Guicciardini, "honest Froissart," the Italian comedians, Rabelais, Boccacio, help to fill up a comprehensive line of reading which ranged the field of literature from St Augustin to Martial,—not too common in our own days, surely very rare in the days of Montaigne.

He has given us a full description of his own personal appearance at forty years of age, when he feels, or professes to feel, that he is fast growing old. The portrait drawn by his own pen is probably not at all more flattering than if it had come from the hand of an admiring contemporary. He was somewhat under the middle height, he tells us, "a defect which has in it not only somewhat of deformity, but still more of inconvenience, especially to those placed in command or in office; for the authority which a fine presence and a majestic person gives is in such a case wanting." On foot he complains that he got covered with mud, and in the street "little fellows like himself were always getting jostled from want of dignity." It was some comfort to him to find, when he was travelling in Italy, that the Grand Duke Francis Maria de Medici was exactly his height.

"For the rest, my figure is strong and well knit; my face not fat but full; my temperament between the cheerful and the melancholic, moderately sanguine and warm; my health sound and vigorous, even now that I am pretty well advanced in age—and it is seldom disturbed by illness. Bodily skill

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and agility I never had, though the son of a very active father, whose sprightliness lasted to his latest years. I never knew a man who equalled him in all bodily exercises; just as I never found one who did not excel me, except in running, at which I was fairly good. In music I could never be taught anything, either vocal (for my voice is a very poor one) or instrumental; in dancing, tennis, wrestling, I could never attain to more than a very slight and ordinary proficiency; in swimming, fencing, vaulting and leaping, none at all. I am so clumsy with my hands that I cannot write well enough for myself to read; so much so, that what I have scribbled I had much rather do over again than give myself the trouble to decipher it; and I hardly read much better.[1] I feel that I distress my listeners; otherwise I am a fair scholar. I do not know how to fold a letter properly. I cannot mend a pen, or carve at table to any purpose, nor saddle and bridle a horse, nor carry a hawk or fly her, nor halloo to a hound, or a hawk, or a horse."—(II. 17.)

He calls himself a great sleeper, taking "eight or nine hours" even in what he reckons his old age. He rose now at seven, never dined before eleven, or supped after six. Two full meals in the day contented him, and he never ate between these. He was not dainty in his choice of dishes, was a moderate drinker, and disliked sitting long at table; but (and it is worth noticing as some evidence of the honesty of his self-revelations) he reproaches himself for a greedy and voracious manner of eating. The minuteness of detail with which he describes all his personal likes and dislikes, and private

[1] His handwriting, however, when he chose, was much better than he pretends, as may be seen from his MS. notes. To write a bad hand seems to have been a fashionable affectation: we find Hamlet saying—

> "I once did hold it, as our statists do,
> A baseness to write fair."—*Hamlet*, Act v. sc. 2.

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habits, is scarcely to be defended on any principle of literary taste, though the egotism has found its apologists. Some of these are angry with the younger Scaliger for remarking, when Montaigne tells us he "preferred white wine,"—"What the deuce does it matter to us which he likes?" But there is much truth in the brusque criticism. His self-drawn portrait of "Montaigne at home" seems to assume on the part of the public much of that greediness for this kind of valet's gossip which is pandered to by some modern journalists. Some of these self-revelations betray a want of respect for his readers as well as for himself. It is not every kind of confidence which is complimentary to the recipient. The swindler who were to confide to us his successful operations must necessarily have assumed a very lax honesty on our own part; and there are secrets shared with our physician or our body-servant which we should least of all dream of imparting to the friends we most love and respect.

There is nothing he is more anxious to impress upon us than the easy and careless style in which his thoughts were set down. On this point we may very fairly suspect that he "doth protest too much." When he tells us that he only wrote to prevent time from hanging heavily on his hands, we are reminded of Pope, who insisted upon it to his friends that he wrote "just when he had nothing else to do," while, in fact, he had his writing-desk set upon his bed every day before he got up; and Lord Oxford's servant complained that one bitter winter night she was called out of bed four times to supply him with paper, lest he should lose a thought. Montaigne's style and composition are, indeed, easy enough, in the best and most

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agreeable sense; but it is hardly necessary to repeat the common distinction between the meaning of the word "easy" as it applies to the reader or the writer. Montaigne says, "I hate reviewing myself, and hardly ever read over again what has once left my hands." He declares more than once that he never made corrections:—

"I add, but I do not correct: in the first place, because he who has once parted with his work to the public has, I conceive, no further right in it. . . . Secondly, because, as concerns myself, I fear to lose by the alteration; my understanding does not always go forward—it goes backward as well. I do not mistrust my thoughts any the less because they are my second or third rather than my first, or because they are the present and not the past. We correct ourselves sometimes quite as foolishly as we correct others. I have grown a good many years older since my first publication, but I doubt whether I am grown an inch wiser."—(III. 9.)

This is very cleverly put; but we have to remember that this passage occurs in the last book of the Essays, which was not published until the two first had gone through several editions, in each of which numerous corrections are to be found.

The two first books of Essays were given to the press in 1580, at Bordeaux. He had begun their composition at least eight years before,[1] immediately after his retirement to his chateau. It was by slow degrees that they took shape under his hand. He was continually adding to them, as he admits, and as is evident by a comparison of the early editions with the later. The second is expressly announced on its title-page as "revised and enlarged;"

[1] See I. 19.

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and a copy of the fifth—the first which contains the third book—published at Paris eight years later, and now in the public library at Bordeaux, is, says Hazlitt, "covered with corrections and additions, marginal and interlineary, in the handwriting of Montaigne himself." In the three first editions the chapters are much shorter, and the classical quotations with which the later issues are filled so largely are very few. He had left orthography and punctuation (which it must be remembered were very unsettled sciences in his days) entirely, as he tells us, to the discretion of his amanuenses, who were not always happy in that respect. For this reason he took upon himself in this fifth edition to insert some special directions to his printers.

With the exception of some occasional business at Bordeaux (where we find him in 1574 presenting letters to the Parliament of that city from the Duc de Montpensier), and probably of some formal attendances at Court, he seems to have spent these eight years, during which his first essays were being shaped for the press, chiefly in the retirement of the country. But he had now begun to suffer from his father's complaint—the stone; he "had gained this much," he says, "from the liberality of increasing years,—and he wished they had given him anything else instead." He had occasionally tried the effects of various medicinal waters and baths which were then in repute and were within tolerably easy reach; going to Bagnères de Bigorre (which he prefers to all others, alike for pleasantness of situation, good accommodation, good cookery, and good company), Lucca, Aigues Caudes (Eaux Chaudes), and even as far as Baden in Switzerland. His views as to the efficacy of

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these fashionable places of resort for invalids are marked by his usual good sense. He does not believe in the extraordinary and miraculous cures which he has heard ascribed to them :—

"Still, I have rarely known any case in which these waters have done harm ; and no unprejudiced person can refuse them this much credit, that they improve the appetite, facilitate digestion, and give one a kind of new life and cheerfulness, provided one has not had recourse to them after the vital forces have been too much lowered, which I advise no one to do. They are not suited to restore a ruined constitution ; but they may relieve a slight indisposition, or check a threatened attack. Those who do not bring with them cheerfulness enough to enjoy the company they will meet with there, and the excursions and exercise to which the beauty of such places generally invites us, undoubtedly lose the best and surest part of their effect."—(II. 37.)

Immediately after the first publication of his book, he set out on a longer journey, partly in search of relief for his complaint, and partly because foreign travel had a special charm for him. Some of his friends tried to persuade him he was too old to go so far from home ; but he was only forty-seven, and very naturally did not see the force of their arguments.

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CHAPTER III.

MONTAIGNE ON HIS TRAVELS.

The journal which Montaigne kept of his travels in Italy, Switzerland, and Germany never saw the light until a hundred and eighty years after his death. The manuscript, a small folio volume of which the first two or three pages are missing, was then accidentally discovered in a chest at the chateau by M. Prunis, who was engaged at the time in making collections for a history of Perigord. More than a third of this journal is not in the author's own handwriting, but in that of a secretary or amanuensis, probably the same to whom he dictated some of the Essays; and as he seems to have been instructed by his employer to write in the first person, it is not always easy to determine how far the words are Montaigne's own. Between the haphazard orthography of the author and the very bad writing of the amanuensis, the manuscript seems to have been by no means easy to decipher, and there are still some manifest errors and inaccuracies in such editions as have been printed.

He left his chateau at the end of June 1580, going probably to Paris in the first instance, and thence to the camp of Maréchal Matignon, then besieging the town of

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La Fere on behalf of the League. There the Count de Grammont was killed, and Montaigne with other friends escorted the body to Soissons. When the journal opens, in its now mutilated state, we find him on the 5th of September at Beaumont-sur-Oise, accompanied, as far as can be made out, by his youngest brother Bertrand, Sieur de Mattecoulon. There the party was joined by M. d'Etissac—no doubt a relative of the lady to whom he inscribed one of his Essays [1]—who brought with him one M. de Hautoy, a gentleman of Lorraine, three servants, and a sumpter-mule with its driver, corresponding on the whole in number to Montaigne's own party—and who was to share with him the expenses of the tour. They travelled for the most part on horseback, as was the habit of the age; but in any case Montaigne would have preferred this mode of conveyance. He could not endure, he says, for any long time together, the motion of a coach, a litter, or a boat, and in the latter he was subject to sea-sickness. But he could with pleasure have passed the greater part of his life on horseback; it was the place where, "whether well or sick, he found himself most at ease." He confesses that he liked to travel somewhat in the grand-gentleman style, "at a cost which he was not very able to bear, being always wont to take the road with a merely sufficient but not handsome equipage;" [2] and of this harmless display of his personal consequence we shall find here and there some other amusing instances. Foreign travel, when he could enjoy it after his own fashion, was a pleasure to him for many reasons. Good Frenchman as he was, he was none the less a citizen of the world.

[1] II. 8. [2] III. 9.

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"Not because Socrates said it, but because it is my own natural humour, possibly even carried to excess, I hold all men for my compatriots, and embrace a Pole as readily as a Frenchman, postponing the national tie to the universal and common one. I am not so very much affected by the sweetness of one's native air; the acquaintances which are wholly new and wholly my own seem to me to be worth more than those common and accidental acquaintances which arise from neighbourhood. Friendships which are purely of our own acquisition generally carry the day over those to which we are bound by the mere connection of locality or of blood. Nature sent us into the world free and unfettered: we imprison ourselves within certain narrow limits, like the kings of Persia, who bound themselves to drink no other water than that of the river Choaspes, renouncing in their folly their right of use to all other streams, and drying up, so far as they were concerned, all the rest of the world. What Socrates asserted when near his end, that he esteemed a sentence of exile as worse than a sentence of death against him, I should never, so far as I know, be so dispirited, or so narrowly prejudiced in favour of my own country, as to say for myself. These exalted characters have many ideas which I embrace rather with respect than with affection; and they have also some of so high-pitched and extraordinary a kind, that I cannot embrace them even with respect, inasmuch as I am unable to conceive them. Such a fancy was very tender in a man who held the whole world to be his city: it is true, he disdained travelling, and had scarcely ever set his foot outside Attica. . . .

"Besides these reasons, travelling seems to me an improving exercise. The mind finds constant employment in observing strange and novel sights; and I know no better school wherein to fashion one's life than to place continually before us so great a variety of other lives, humours, and customs, and to make acquaintance with such a constant diversity of the forms of human nature. The bodily powers are neither idle nor over-worked, and this moderate excitement

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keeps them in health. I can remain on horseback without dismounting, though suffering as I do, for eight or ten hours. No weather is my enemy, except the fierce heat of a scorching sun. . . . I love rain and mud as much as the ducks do. Change of air and climate does not affect me at all: all skies are the same to me. I am not easy to be got astir, but, once on the road, I can go as far as you like. I have learnt to travel in the Spanish fashion, in one respect, —long and careful journeys, all made in a single stage, and in very hot weather to make them during the night, from sunset to sunrise; the other fashion of baiting in the middle of the day, and dining in hurry and confusion, especially in short days, being very inconvenient. My horses are all the better for it: never has a horse broken down with me which was able to stand the first day's journey. I water them at every stream I pass, and am only careful that they have still far enough to travel to warm the water in their bellies. My own laziness in rising gives time for my servants to dine at their leisure before we set out. As to myself, I never eat until very late: my appetite comes with eating, and at no other time. I am never hungry but when at table."—(III. 9.)

His ordinary breakfast on the road was nothing more than a piece of bread, which he ate as he rode along, adding to it a bunch of grapes when he was in the vine-growing districts. Journeying in this fashion, the party arrived by easy stages at Epernay, where Montaigne "went to mass as was his habit," and afterwards invited to dinner with him the learned Spanish Jesuit, Juan Maldonado (better known to us as Maldonatus), whose commentary on the Gospels is still held in almost as high esteem by Protestants as by his own Church. Whatever places he visited, he took every opportunity of introducing himself to men of literary reputation; and in this, no doubt, the style in which he travelled,

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and here and there the reputation which his Essays were already beginning to make for him, would give him considerable facilities. Above all things, he delighted in discussing theological subjects with men of every shade of religious belief; and we may readily conceive how often the free questioning of so shrewd a layman must have embarrassed the more prudent and reticent divines to whom he addressed himself. In this interview with Maldonatus, however, though they had a long conversation, both before and after dinner, "upon learned subjects," the most interesting part of the discussion to the traveller himself—at least the only part of which he seems to have thought it worth his while to make notes—was on the virtues of the mineral springs of Spa, from which place the Jesuit father had just returned. For Montaigne was suffering much at this time from his chronic complaint, and omitted from his route several places which he had hoped to visit, in his anxiety to reach, with as little delay as possible, the baths of Plombières, which he did by way of Chalons, Bar-le-duc, and Neuchatel.

At Plombières he remained eleven days, drinking the waters regularly, and occasionally using the baths. He records here, as at the other watering-places which he visited, with all the tedious detail of a confirmed valetudinarian, the number of glasses he drank each day, the baths he took, and their effect on his appetite, sleep, and digestion,—naturally enough, as this was one special object of his journey, and there is no reason to suppose that the journal was intended for publication. The reader will bear patiently with these medical memoranda, in consideration of the many interesting and

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amusing notices of other kinds which he will not fail to find in the tour of so intelligent a French gentleman three hundred years ago. But we can hardly help smiling, though such inconsistency is common enough, at the man who rails so loudly against physic and physicians, yet takes upon himself, without advice or experiment, to drink at first starting nine glasses of mineral water at 7 A.M. But neither Plombières nor any of the other baths which he visited appear to have had any remarkable effect upon his health, either one way or the other. If he fancied at times that they gave him some relief, it was but temporary.

Plombières had become at that date, as it has been since, a favourite resort for the French; and the place was under very strict police regulations, of which we find a copy inserted. The people, we are assured—Lorraine was German then, as it is again now—were "a worthy set—frank, sensible, and obliging." Before Montaigne left the place, he had an escutcheon of his arms fixed, "at the request of his landlady," against the outside wall of his apartment; and no doubt the collar of St Michel figured there conspicuously. At Plombières, as elsewhere, such was the customary record of the sojourn of a distinguished visitor; but at the baths of Della-Villa, to which he afterwards paid a long visit, he distinctly says he first introduced the custom.

They rode along the banks of the Moselle, striking Germany at Thann, and thence to Mulhaus and Bâle. Civilities and honours welcomed them at each halting-place. Montaigne was evidently pleased to set down in his journal that the landlord of the Grapes at Mulhaus, who had just been sitting as president at a

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meeting of the town-council—"held in a magnificent and richly gilded palace"—waited on his distinguished guests in person at dinner. At Bâle the municipality sent them a present of wine by one of their officers, who paid them the inconvenient compliment of making them "a long harangue while they were at table, to which M. de Montaigne replied also at some length, both parties remaining uncovered," and neither understanding much of what was said, since the host had to act as interpreter. Though they only stayed at Bâle one clear day, their supper-party included two of the most learned residents—Felix Plater, the chief physician of the city, and Francis Hofman or Hotteman, the French professor of laws, whose life his pupils saved at the Massacre of St Bartholomew—whom Montaigne engaged in the usual theological discussion. He remarks, as we might now, the tolerance which has preserved most of the Roman Catholic furniture and ornaments in the cathedral church, and the passion of the citizens for balconies and public fountains.

He drank the waters for a few days at Baden, saw the falls of Schaffhausen, avoided Zurich because he heard that the plague was there, and notes at Landsperg, on the Lech, a cynical motto on one of the town gates which must have been very much to his mind—"*Cavea stultorum mundus*"—"The world is a cage of fools." At Augsburg they again received a present of wine from the public authorities, carried in by seven sergeants in uniform under a superior officer. "They took us," says the writer of the journal, "for knights or barons. M. de Montaigne, for reasons of his own, had desired us not to say who we were, and not to mention the rank of gentle-

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man; he walked all day by himself through the town, and fancied that this of itself served to make them be held in more honour." In passing through the cathedral, "feeling chilly" (says the journal) "he put his handkerchief up to his mouth, thinking no one would notice him." He says he was told afterwards this had given offence to the clerical authorities. Very probably it had stirred their curiosity; and one cannot help suspecting, when we couple this movement with his studied concealment of his actual rank, that the traveller meant to give the good people of Augsburg the idea that he was some great man travelling *incognito*. He left, as a memorial of his visit, a copy of his arms on wood, "very well done." He complains at Augsburg, as in other places afterwards, that he saw "very few pretty women in the churches:" it seems that, like his fellow-journalist Mr Pepys, he carried on his observations in that line jointly with his notes on theology. There were three things which he regretted not having thought of before he left home: to take a cook with him (not to make French dishes, but to learn foreign ones); to engage a German valet or gentleman, that he might not be left at the mercy of "a blockhead of a guide;" and that he had not read beforehand some books to inform him as to what was best worth seeing in the towns he visited.

By Munich, up the valley of the Inn to Innspruck, by Verona, where he visited the synagogue and inquired particularly into the Jewish rites and ceremonies, they reached Padua, where he found as many as a hundred young French gentlemen (probably students at the university) assembled in the riding-school.

"He thought it a great disadvantage to our young coun-

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trymen who visit the place, to associate in this way almost exclusively with each other; seeing that such association confines them to the manners and language of their own nation, and so deprives them of all opportunity of making themselves acquainted with those of foreigners."

Some similar remarks in one of the essays on this inveterate nationalism, common to all travellers in all times (and perhaps not so very unnatural, after all), are in a more caustic tone.

"When I have been abroad out of France, and when people have asked me, out of courtesy, whether I would be served in the French fashion? I have laughed at them, and always sat down at the tables most occupied by foreigners. I am ashamed to see my fellow-countrymen besotted with that stupid humour of finding fault with all fashions opposed to their own. They seem to be out of their element when they get out of their own village; wherever they go they stick to their own ways, and abominate these foreigners. Do they fall in with a fellow-countryman in Hungary? They congratulate themselves on the meeting: from that moment they are inseparable, and lay their heads together to abuse all the customs they have seen: how can they be other than barbarous customs, seeing they are not French? Indeed, the cleverest people are those who have noticed things sufficiently to abuse them. Most of them go only to come home again; they travel wrapped up in themselves, closed against all intercourse, with a taciturn and unsociable caution, to protect themselves against the infection of a foreign air."—(III. 9.)

"For my part," adds the writer afterwards, "I travel away from my own fashions—not to look for Gascons in Sicily: I have left them at home; I had rather look for Greeks and Persians."

He missed very much, as he got into Italy, the Ger-

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man cleanliness, the stoves to whose peculiar heat he had got accustomed, and the eider-down quilts which had specially delighted him. He shows more appreciation of scenery than we usually find expressed by early travellers; but it is the rich and fertile scenery of the hill-slopes and the valleys. Like his favourite Romans, he could see little in the grandeur of the Apennines but "frowning and inaccessible precipices;" and only admits that they "did not spoil" the beautiful prospect. About Italy he shows no enthusiasm. "As for Rome," he tells us through his amanuensis, "about which other people were so eager, he was the less anxious to see it because wellnigh every one else had seen it; and as for Florence and Ferrara, there was hardly a lackey to be found who could not tell one all about them." He went to Rome and Florence eventually, but by a very circuitous route. In fact, his propensity to zigzag here and there in his tour, as he does in his Essays, just as the fancy seized him, must have made him rather an exacting and uncomfortable fellow-traveller.

"When the other gentlemen complained of his leading them such dances here and there to out-of-the-way places, often coming back almost to the very spot he set out from, as he always did whenever he heard of anything within reach that was worth seeing, or for any other reason thought it desirable to change his plan, he would reply, that for his own part the particular place where he happened to be was the very place he had meant to come to; that he could not possibly be diverging from his route, seeing that the only route he had laid down was to go about seeing new places; and so long as he did not travel the same road twice, or go twice to the same place, they could not say he had not carried out his plan."

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He spent a week in Venice, which he had a strong desire to see, but with which he professed himself disappointed. Returning to Padua, he proceeded leisurely by way of Ferrara and Bologna. At the former place he paid his respects to the Grand Duke, Alphonso d'Este, who conversed with him in "very elegant Italian," when he found that one of his visitors was acquainted with the language. While at Ferrara he saw one of the saddest sights that any traveller's eyes could look upon—the poet Tasso confined as a lunatic in the Hospital of St Anne, where he remained for seven miserable years. By some strange omission, no note of it is made in the journal. But he has a few pathetic words on it in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond:"—

"As from great friendships spring great enmities, and mortal diseases from vigorous health; so from the exceptional and vivid emotions of our souls arise the most strange and distracted frenzies: it takes but half a turn of the foot to pass from one to the other. In the actions of madmen we see how nearly allied madness is with the most vigorous operations of the mind. Who does not know how imperceptible is the borderland between madness and the sprightly emotions of a lively spirit? . . . Great wits are ruined by their own force and suppleness. Into what a state has lately fallen, through his own emotions and lively fancies, one of the most able and brilliant of the Italian poets, who approached most nearly to the pure style of ancient poesy! Has he not to thank his own fatal powers—the light that has blinded him?—that exact and subtle apprehension of reason, which has made him lose his own? that curious and laborious quest of knowledge, which has led him into imbecility—that rare aptitude for mental exercises which has left him now without mind or the power to exercise it? I felt even more anger than compassion to see him at Ferrara in such a piteous state, surviving himself, forgetting both

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himself and his works, which have been given to the public unpolished and uncorrected, without his knowledge though before his eyes."—(II. 12.)

Having heard that the road to Rome through the Duchy of Spoleto was infested with banditti, the travellers resolved to take their way by Florence. This Montaigne says he found the dearest city in Italy, while neither the lodgings, nor the cookery, nor the wines, nor the beds, were at all to his liking, and where he "found nothing to amuse him either in body or mind," though he dined with the Grand Duke and the too well-known Bianca Capello, formerly his mistress, but now made his wife by a public marriage. It must surely have been in a fit of ill-humour, or he must have had peculiar taste in the matter of beauty, when he directed his secretary to set down that "he had never been in a country where he saw so few pretty women as in Italy."

Rome pleased him better, only that he found it too full of Frenchmen, and heard too much of his own language in the streets. It struck him at once forcibly that the Rome of history was a buried city, whose foundations lie, as he says in one of his essays, "deep down in the antipodes,"—that "the modern Romans were walking on the tops of the habitations of their ancestors."

"There is nothing to be seen of ancient Rome except the sky under which it rose and stood, and the outlines of its form. Such knowledge of it as he had was altogether abstract and ideal, no image of it now remaining to satisfy the outward senses. They who have asserted that at least the ruins of Rome were still to be seen, said more than the facts warranted; for the ruins of so vast and majestic a pile would have insured more honour and reverence for its memory: nothing remained of Rome but its sepulchre. The world,

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detesting her long domination, had first destroyed and broken into fragments the various parts of that wondrous body, and then, finding that even when dead, prostrate, and disfigured, she still filled them with dread, they buried her very ruins. . . . The buildings in this bastard Rome which the moderns were erecting upon or appending to those glorious structures of antiquity, though they might suffice to call forth the admiration of the present age, yet seemed to him very much to resemble the nests which the crows and sparrows build on to the roofs and walls of those churches in France which have been destroyed by the Huguenots."

He visited the ancient quarters of the city every day, "studying every part of it in detail." He had hired, in the first instance, a French guide, but the man took offence one day and left him. From that time he contented himself with studying books and maps carefully the evening before, and acting next morning on their information. Very soon, he says, he "could have guided his guide;" and certainly very few travellers of the sixteenth century could have brought at once the same store of classical reading, and the same intelligent observation, to the exploration of these wondrous ruins. "I have been bred up amongst this people," he says in one of his essays; "I understood the affairs of Rome long before I did those of my own house; I knew the Capitol and its plan long before I knew the Louvre, and the Tiber long before the Seine."

His stay at Rome lasted nearly five months (from Nov. 30 to April 19); and his interest in the antiquities of the place did not prevent his going through a course of general sight-seeing curiously resembling that which commends itself to modern travellers. On Christmas-day he heard the grand Pontifical mass at St Peter's;

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observed, as we may too often now at these grand religious ceremonies at Rome and elsewhere, that during the whole time the ecclesiastical dignitaries were talking and chatting together, and that there was "more magnificence than devotion;" and observed also, as we certainly should not in these days, that they drank from the sacred chalice through a certain instrument "in order to secure themselves against poison." On Maunday Thursday, when one of the canons read "at the full pitch of his voice" the bull of excommunication against heretics, and against all princes who held possession of any estates belonging to the Church, he noticed that the Cardinals de Medici and Caraffa, "who stood close by the Pope, laughed heartily at this last article." The travellers had an audience of his Holiness, and kissed his foot,—a ceremony which the "Muscovite" ambassador (who could speak no language but his own, and had brought no interpreter) for a long time stoutly resisted, and was only induced to comply by being assured that even his master the Czar (Ivan the Terrible) would have to do it, for the precedent set by kings he felt it beneath his dignity to follow. Montaigne pleased himself by fancying that, when it came to his own turn, his Holiness "raised his foot a little." The Pope, Gregory XIII., who was then above eighty years old, made a strong impression on him, as a fine old man, with a long white beard, upright and majestic, with no signs of bodily infirmity. He is described as of a very gentle character, charitable in the extreme, and very easy of access; busying himself very little with politics, and rather too much disinclined to give himself any trouble about public business; but firm in his decisions, and earnestly bent on doing what he deemed right

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and just. His great pleasure was in building and endowing colleges for foreigners at Rome. During the visit of the travellers, the Portuguese ambassador did homage to the Pope for his master Philip II.; on which occasion the Muscovite envoy, who was present, expressed his opinion that the show was a very poor one indeed: "in his own country, when they spoke of bodies of horsemen, they always meant twenty-five or thirty thousand." Montaigne inspected the Vatican Library, and most of the churches, and witnessed the ceremony of circumcision in the Jewish synagogue; was present at the execution (by hanging) of a notorious brigand chief named Catena, who had long been the terror of Italy, and had been guilty of the most brutal murders. His body was afterwards quartered; when Montaigne remarked that "strangely enough, though the execution itself seemed to cause no emotion in the spectators, the first blow of the quartering awoke a lamentable cry of horror." He made several excursions in the neighbourhood, and was invited to a state dinner by one of the cardinals, by the governor of the city, and by the English ambassador, at whose table he met his old tutor Muretus, and "other learned men." The Jesuit Maldonatus, his old acquaintance of Epernay, he also met again in Roman society, and found that he agreed with him in opinion that the lower orders were more devout, but the higher classes less so, in Rome than in France, and that "there were more religious men in Paris than in all Spain." Of the Jesuit society generally the traveller formed a high opinion.

"Never, I think, was there a community amongst us which occupied so high a place, or produced such results, as

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these men will, if their plans are not interrupted. They are in occupation of almost all Christendom, and daily send forth from their body men great in every class of greatness. They are the part of our Church system which threatens the most danger to the heretics of our times."

His description of the ceremonies of Holy Week and of the Carnival, much too long for quotation, are full of interesting details, and show in how many points these shows were the same three hundred years ago as they are now. He has at least one amusing story connected with these exhibitions which is not open to the objection attaching to so many of the amusing stories he tells. In the various long processions on Holy Thursday, he saw marching between the ranks a long file of penitents—five hundred at the least—who scourged themselves vigorously with cords from time to time, so that "their backs were torn and bleeding in a piteous fashion."

"This exhibition," he says, "is a mystery I am not yet able quite to make out. They are unquestionably very much torn and wounded, and they keep lashing themselves continually; yet from their demeanour, their firm step, the steadiness of their voice (for I heard several speak), and the expression of their countenances (for many of them walked uncovered through the street), you would have had no idea they were performing a painful or even serious action: yet among them were lads of not more than twelve or thirteen. One of them, quite a boy, with a very pleasant countenance, passed close by me. A young woman uttered a cry of pity when she saw how he was hurting himself; upon which he turned round to us and said, laughing, '*Basta! disse che fo questo per li lui peccati, non per li miei.*' ('Pshaw! tell her I am doing this for *her* sins, not for my own.')[1] Not only do they show no distress or want of will in this business,

[1] The Italian is Montaigne's own.

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but they do it with cheerfulness, or at least with such indifference, that you see them occupying their attention with other matters,—laughing and shouting in the street, running about and jumping, as people do in a great crush like that, when the line gets thrown into confusion."

These penitents, whom he suspected to be poor people of the lower class who hired out their backs for the occasion, were accompanied at certain intervals by men carrying wine, which was from time to time offered them to drink, and also to wash their wounds.

Before Montaigne left the city, he succeeded, not without some difficulty, by grace of the Pope's major-domo, who had taken a great fancy to him, in obtaining his enrolment as a Roman citizen; a dignity which he tells us he "had set all his wits to work to obtain," and of which he confesses he was very proud. He transcribes the Latin bull, "magnificent with seals and gilt letters," at the end of his essay "On Vanity;" and it is a document curious enough, with its juxtaposition of the Senate of Rome and His Most Christian Majesty of France, and its signature of "Horatius Fuscus, *Sacri S.P.Q.R. Scriba.*" But while in that essay he speaks of the citizenship of Rome as one of the honours which were "not granted to him, but spontaneously offered," the more private record of the journal tells us that "he set all his five wits to work to obtain it."

By this time he had sent home, for some reason or other, the person who had been acting as his secretary, and continued the journal in his own handwriting, though, as he says, not much relishing the trouble. He had not escaped one of the annoyances common to travellers then as now,—the having his trunks remorselessly overhauled

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at the Roman custom-house, and "every article, down to the most trifling, rummaged and tumbled about." The books, of course, were carried off for strict examination by the authorities, lest heresy should be surreptitiously conveyed into the holy city. Among these was a copy of the Essays, which some time afterwards was returned to him with passages marked for expurgation. Unquestionably a good Catholic might have found many objectionable passages in the volumes; but most of those censured seem to have been of the most harmless nature, and the author defended them stoutly. There could be no great harm, he thought, in his use of the term "Chance" (where it would have been more orthodox to write "Providence"), or in his quotations from heretical poets, or in his apology for Julian the Apostate;[1] still less in his remarks that people in a sinful state of mind were not fit to go to prayer, or that to add torture to capital punishment was cruelty, or that a boy should be taught to do everything. If these honest opinions of his were errors in the sight of Holy Church, at least he had not been aware of it. The *Maestro* of the Sacred College, who appears to have been a sensible man (though he knew nothing of French, and only got his report of the Essays second-hand) was very much of Montaigne's opinion; and here is the account of their parting interview:—

"On the 15th of April I went to take leave of the *Maestro del Sacro Palazzo* and his colleague, who begged me to pay no

[1] He enters upon a long and able defence of this emperor (from which later apologists have largely borrowed) in the 19th essay of the Second Book. He contends that, though surnamed "Apostate" for having abjured the Christian religion, "it is more likely that he had never really adopted it, but had only conformed, in obedience to the laws, till he succeeded to the empire."

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attention to the censure of my book, as several Frenchmen, they said, had since informed them that it contained many absurdities. They assured me that they entertained a high opinion of my motives and my abilities, and also of my good-will towards the Church: adding, that they had such confidence in my conscientiousness and honesty, that they would leave it entirely to me, whenever I reprinted my book, to omit or correct any passages in which, on consideration, I might find I had expressed myself too freely, and among other things, the use of the expression 'Chance.'"

They assured him, for his further comfort, that many ecclesiastics of high reputation—even cardinals—had been censured for some passages in their writings, and were not a whit the worse thought of by the faithful.

Four days after this interview the travellers left Rome by the old Via Flaminia for Loretto, which they reached by leisurely stages in five days. They found the roads which converged on it crowded with pilgrims coming and going,—not only single travellers, but "companies of rich men performing the journey on foot," all dressed alike, and commonly preceded by a banner and crucifix. Montaigne paid his devotions at the Santa Casa (which he describes as "a small brick house, very old and poor") in the most orthodox fashion; made his communion in the chapel itself—"a privilege not accorded to every one"—and bestowed there an *ex-voto* offering of some intrinsic value —a frame in which were fixed four silver statuettes, representing the Virgin, with kneeling figures of himself and his wife and daughter, with the names in Latin; his own as *Eques Regii ordinis*, which is somewhat ambitious Latin to express a "Chevalier of the Order of St Michel." During his short stay he also "got rid of fifty good crowns in wax tapers, images, rosaries, *Agnus Dei*, and

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such commodities," which were on sale in all quarters. His conduct on this and on other occasions will have to be noted hereafter in estimating the quality, negative or positive, of his religion. It is very easy to say that his communion and his votive offering at Loretto were mere concessions to conventionality; much easier to say than to prove. He speaks of the abundant miracles, for which "every step in the place is famous," much in the tone of a Protestant traveller now; yet he relates the story of one cure effected on a young Parisian gentleman as though the evidence fairly satisfied him. Perhaps the very tone in which he talks of "getting rid of his good crowns" in exchange for consecrated tapers may be only the affectation of a man of fashion ashamed of appearing too much in earnest in such matters.

From Loretto he went on to the baths of Della Villa, near Lucca, taking Florence again in his way. At these baths he lodged in a private house, with a gentleman "who called himself Captain Paulini, and was a real army captain, too," he assures us — where he found himself, on the whole, very comfortable. He led a very retired life, employing a good deal of his time in learning Italian, and beginning during his stay to write his journal in that language; but the admixture of French idioms and of the *patois* of the district, combined with the irregular orthography, make it very difficult even for an Italian scholar to understand in the original. In fact, he seems to have carried out in some degree, in his composition, the receipt which he gives in one of his essays for learning Italian: "You have only to take the first words which come to your tongue — Latin, French, Spanish, or Gascon — and add to

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them the Italian terminations, and you can never fail to fall in with some idiom of the country, either Tuscan, or Roman, or Venetian, or Piedmontese, or Neapolitan."[1] He spent great part of May and June at Della Villa (finding himself on his first arrival the earliest visitor), and again part of August and September, paying a visit in the interval to Florence and Pisa. He was suffering severely in his health most of the time, and found little relief either from the baths or the waters. Much of his journal at this period consists of the tedious details of an invalid who undertakes his own medical treatment; but it is fair to say that in spite of this, the prevailing tone, far from being querulous or impatient, is cheerful and contented. He professes himself thankful for the many blessings Heaven has sent him, and the ills allotted to his share he will strive to bear as becomes a man. And when he says in one place, "God's will be done!" it is possible that he attaches to that common formula neither more nor less meaning than do thousands who daily use it.

During one of the intervals of his suffering he amused himself by giving a grand ball and supper, one Sunday afternoon, to the young men and girls of the neighbourhood, at which prizes of no great value were to be awarded to the best and most graceful dancers. It appears to have been not unusual for visitors of distinction to give this sort of treat to the peasantry; and Montaigne—always kindly in his relations with the working classes, and always glad to figure as grand seigneur—entered heartily into the spirit of the evening, and describes it at considerable length. The dancing began out of doors,

[1] Essays, II. 12.

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but finding it too hot, the company adjourned to "the great hall of the Buonvisi palace." Besides his humbler guests, he had invited all the visitors and neighbouring gentry; and he was not a little anxious during the earlier hours of the entertainment as to whether these latter would come. They appeared, however, in good time, and all took part in the dancing; and some of the ladies were obliging enough, at their host's request, to form themselves into a committee of taste, and assist him in awarding the prizes. This was done with many speeches and compliments on all sides; and nothing apparently could have been more successful than the whole affair, which after all was done very cheaply. "It was really a most charming, and, for a Frenchman, an unusual spectacle, to see these country girls, so handsome and so well dressed, quite like ladies, dancing with as much grace and elegance as the best amongst us, only in a different fashion." It is highly characteristic of the writer that he gave away one of the prizes slyly to "a pretty girl outside the ball," and that he invited to the supper a peasant woman—"very ugly, with a goitre in her neck"—who had a passion for the verse of Ariosto, and was a kind of improvisatrice after her humble fashion. Such acquaintance with the great national poet was by no means uncommon among the Italian peasantry; he speaks of constantly seeing the men, "after their day's work, sitting with lutes in their hands, and their sweethearts by their sides, reciting whole stanzas from memory."

It was immediately after one of his most acute fits of suffering that Montaigne received a communication by private letter which led him to return homewards at once. He had been unanimously elected, in his absence,

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Mayor of the city of Bordeaux, an office which had been held by his father, and which his correspondent now called upon him to accept "for the love of his country." He hesitated at first; but he left the baths a few days afterwards for Rome, where he found awaiting him the official document announcing his election. He returned forthwith to France by way of Genoa, Turin, and Milan, and reached once more his chateau of Montaigne, June 22, 1581. There he found a letter from the king, Henry III., "ordering and enjoining" him to accept the office of mayor, and assuring him that such acceptance would be very agreeable, and his refusal highly displeasing to his Majesty. Montaigne tells us in his Essays[1] that it was this interposition of the royal command which won from him a reluctant consent to take office; but such a statement is hardly consistent with the facts as set down in his journal.

[1] III. 10.

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CHAPTER IV.

MONTAIGNE IN OFFICE.

THE mayoralty of Bordeaux, in the sixteenth century, must not be confounded in idea with such an office as administered now in any of our provincial cities. In point of state and dignity, our own "Lord Mayor" scarcely approaches it. The office implied in itself a patent of nobility. Bordeaux was at that time the third in importance of the cities of France. All its ancient privileges, forfeited by the insurrection of 1548, had long since been restored. The mayor was always chosen, as the Chronique Bordeloise informs us, "from among the most noble, valiant, and able seigneurs of the district." He must be, above all things, "a gentleman, following the profession of arms;"[1] and an election had even been refused confirmation by the king because this essential qualification had been overlooked. Montaigne's immediate predecessor in office had been, as he takes pleasure in telling us, the Duc de Biron, and he was succeeded by M. de Matignon,—both Marshals of France. A troop of cavalry was under the mayor's immediate command, and his standard was always borne

[1] M. Grun, Vie publique de M. de Montaigne, p. 211.

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by gentlemen of noble houses. In official processions he was preceded by forty archers of the guard in scarlet surcoats; and he himself, in a robe of red and white velvet, rode on horseback followed by the jurats of the city. He was, in fact, a military as well as civil officer, holding a high position, and with considerable responsibilities.

But in spite of these considerations, which might have made the mayoralty agreeable to him, Montaigne's professed reluctance to accept it was probably not altogether affected. He hated the shackles and the responsibility of public business, or indeed of business of any kind. Here is one of his many confessions of this feeling scattered here and there through the Essays, in which there must have been some truth, even after allowing for that half-affected exaggeration of his own weaknesses which we find so often:—

"During the eighteen years I have managed my own estate, I have never been able to prevail with myself to look at my title-deeds, or see into those important matters of business which ought necessarily to be carried on under my own cognisance and attention. This is no philosophic contempt for transitory and worldly matters: I have not such a purified taste, and take these things for at least as much as they are worth; but certainly it is an idleness and negligence inexcusable and childish. What would I not rather do than read over a contract? or than go and rummage dusty papers, the slave of my business—or, still worse, of other people's business, as so many do for money? I hold nothing so dear-bought as care and trouble, and aim at nothing so much as ease and quiet."—(III. 9.)

So again, in his essay "On the Inconveniences of Greatness," his remarks on his own distaste for high

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office are not contradicted by anything that we know of his public life:—

"It never befell me to wish for empire or royalty, or the elevation of high and commanding position. I do not cast my eyes that way: I love myself too much. When I think of rising, 'tis in a very humble way, by a constrained and timorous advancement, proper to myself,—in resolution, in prudence, in health, in good looks, and in riches too: but those high dignities and supreme powers oppress my imagination. And quite in opposition to what the other said,[1] I should perhaps like better to be second or third in Perigord than to be first in Paris; or at any rate, without falsehood, to be third in Paris rather than be first in office there. I am bound to a moderate station, not only by fortune but by choice; and I have shown in the whole of my life and conduct that I have rather avoided than otherwise the climbing above that station in life in which Heaven placed me at my birth. One's natural position is alike suited to us and easily filled. My spirit is so much of a poltroon, that I do not measure good fortune by its height,—I measure it by its easiness of attainment."—(III. 7.)

He was sufficiently plain-spoken in giving the good citizens of Bordeaux to understand what manner of man they had elected as their chief magistrate. He warned them that they were not to expect to find in the son that devotion to municipal duties which they remembered in the father. His father, he says—and here he takes another opportunity of offering his tribute of filial praise—had "a marvellous goodness of nature; never was there a kinder or more public-spirited man." But he had been almost too devoted a public servant, even to the breaking of his rest when his years most required it,

[1] Julius Cæsar, who (according to Plutarch) said he had rather be the first in an Alpine village than the second in Rome.

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to the injury of his health, and the prejudice of his private interests. Such martyrdom to the duties of office Montaigne the younger was by no means inclined to undergo.

"I represented to them faithfully and conscientiously all that I felt myself to be,—a man without memory, without vigilance, without experience, and without energy; but also, without hate, without ambition, without avarice, and without violence,—that they might thus be forewarned and instructed what they had to expect from my services. And inasmuch as the knowledge they had of my late father, and their respect for his memory, had alone led them to their choice, I told them very plainly that I should be very sorry that anything should affect my feelings so strongly as their affairs and the interests of their city had affected his."

The tenure of the mayoralty was for a period of two years, and Montaigne's regular term of office seems to have passed over quietly enough. One or two letters from him at this date are extant, and there are notices of him here and there in contemporary memoirs, but nothing of importance as bearing on his character or conduct. It seems to have been not unusual, in the case of an able or popular mayor, to re-elect him for two years longer: and we may take it as evidence that the Seigneur de Montaigne had filled the office to the general satisfaction of his constituents, that the compliment of re-election was paid him,—not, however, without considerable opposition, as we learn from the records of the time, though such opposition seems to have turned rather on the legality of a re-election than on the personal claims of the candidate.

But stormy days were now beginning for France, and the quality of the mayor of Bordeaux was more likely to

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be tested in his second term of office than in his first. The "Holy League," as it was termed, had been organised a few years before by the second Duke of Guise, with the avowed object of protecting the Catholic faith, which was held to be endangered by the late concession of religious freedom and political rights to the Huguenots. The League pronounced the exclusion of all Protestant princes from the throne of France: and the vices of the present occupant, Henry III., furnished Guise (who had his own private ambitions) with a pretext for denouncing him as a secret enemy to the faith. Henry had at first appealed to his namesake of Navarre, who as a Protestant claimant to the succession was specially excluded by the rules of the League, for aid against this powerful faction; but he subsequently made terms with its leaders, and declared war against the King of Navarre. A civil war of the fiercest description was now desolating the country. Armed bands of marauders, using the watchwords of the King, of Guise, or of Navarre, carried pillage and destruction even into the distant provinces; and no French gentleman could feel that his house, his property, or his life, were safe from day to day.

The mayor of Bordeaux would find his office by no means a sinecure in such troublous times. There is no reason to suppose that he in any way failed in his public duties; such evidence as we have (and some of his correspondence of this date has lately been discovered) tends to show that he was at his post when matters looked most dangerous, and that he was thoroughly trusted by the Marshal de Matignon, then holding the military government of the district under Henry III. It was most likely at Bordeaux or in its immediate neighbour-

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hood, on some occasion of public excitement, that the following scene took place, as related incidentally in one of the essays. It may be taken as fair evidence that the mayor did not lack some of the qualities of a military commander.

"There was a consultation as to holding a general review of certain troops under arms. Now this is a convenient opportunity for secret revenge, and there is no occasion when it can be carried out with greater security. There were public and notorious symptoms that the affair would not be very safe for some whose duty it necessarily was to take the chief command in the review. Various counsels were offered, as upon a difficult question, and one which might have weighty consequences. My advice was, to avoid above all things showing any sign of this distrust, and that we should go and ride through the lines with a confident air and composed countenance; and that instead of cutting anything short (to which the opinions of others rather tended), we should, on the contrary, desire the officers to charge their men to fire sharp and full volleys in honour of the company, and not to spare their powder. This had the effect of gratifying the suspected regiments, and engendered from that time forth a mutual confidence which was very advantageous."—(III. 10.)

We may conclude that Montaigne's influence had much to do with a formal remonstrance presented to the king in 1583 by the Mayor and Jurats, setting forth the undue severity with which taxation pressed on the labouring classes, owing to the numerous legal exemptions claimed by the privileged orders,—whereas, pleaded the remonstrants, "it was but reasonable that those in easy circumstances should contribute more than those whose means were precarious and who lived by the sweat of their brow." The document also contained a suggestion that to avoid the misery and the scandal of the crowd of

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mendicants who were wandering through the country, sufferers from the rapine and pillage of the civil wars, an edict of Charles IX. should be revived by which each township should be compelled to maintain its own poor. How far these wise and humane suggestions were attended to is very doubtful; but they are entirely in accordance with all that we know of the Essayist's feelings on these points.

We may perhaps gather from some expressions in the Essays—especially in the tenth of the Third Book, where his mayoralty in fact serves him as his text—that the writer himself was not altogether satisfied with his official career. He had found, as all men in office find, dissatisfied critics of his government.

"Some say of this municipal office of mine, that I have behaved in it like a man too lazy to exert himself, and with but a languid attention; and they are not without some apparent reason for what they say. I try to keep my thoughts and my mind in repose,—'as being always quiet by nature, so now from age:'[1] and if they now and then break out when some strong and forcible impression is made on them, it is without intention of mine. Yet from this natural indolence people ought not to draw any proof of incapacity (for want of pains and want of sense are two different things), and still less of indifference or ingratitude towards those citizens who did all that lay in their power to gratify me, both before they knew me and afterwards; and who did far more for me in renewing their trust than in first bestowing it. I wish them all the good possible; and assuredly, had occasion offered, there is nothing I would have spared in their service. I did for them as I would have done for myself. They say that my administration passed without mark or anything worthy of record. Be it so: they accuse my inactivity at

[1] He is quoting from Cicero.

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a time when almost every one was convicted of doing too much. . . . I came prepared to exert myself somewhat more, if there had been any real occasion; for it is in my power to do rather more than I either do or am fond of doing. I never omitted, so far as I know, any exertion which duty fairly required of me. . . . I do not find fault with a magistrate who goes to sleep, provided the people sleep as well as he: in that case, the laws may safely sleep too."—(III. 10.)

"Montaigne," says M. Villemain in his *Éloge*, "believed that his government had not been severe enough: I think so too; no doubt he was better fitted to study men than to govern them." Something like a conscious regret for missed opportunities appears in the words which conclude some remarks on those who are neither simply content with ignorance and obscurity, nor capable of attaining the higher regions of knowledge and usefulness — "who sit between two stools, as I and many more do; and therefore it is," he continues, "that for my part I retire so far as I can into my first and natural station, whence I unsuccessfully tried to advance."[1]

But to the miseries of civil strife were now added those of pestilence. It seems to have begun in the city of Bordeaux itself, to have spread thence throughout the district, and to have been especially virulent and fatal in the neighbourhood of the Chateau de Montaigne. In Bordeaux itself, out of a population of 40,000, 18,000 are said to have died. It has been urged against the mayor that he deserted his post when this danger was greatest, and when the presence of the chief magistrate might have helped to preserve confidence, and enforce such sanitary measures as might be needful. He cer-

[1] I. 54.

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tainly declined to return there, to preside as requested at the election of his successor, in July 1585. The letter is extant in which he thus excuses himself :—

"*To the Jurats of Bordeaux.*

"GENTLEMEN, — I have received here by accident your message through favour of M. le Maréchal. I would spare neither life nor anything else in your service ; and I will leave you to judge whether anything that I could do for you by my presence at the coming election is worth the risk I should run by coming into the city, considering the bad state it is now in, and notoriously for persons coming from the fresh pure air, as I do. I will approach on Wednesday as near you as I can, to Feuillasse, if the disease has not reached that place ; and then, as I wrote to M. la Motte, I shall be very happy to have the honour of meeting any one of your body, to receive your commands, and to discharge myself of anything M. le Maréchal may intrust me with for your company. Recommending myself humbly to your good graces, and praying God to give you, gentlemen, a long and happy life, your humble servant and brother, MONTAIGNE.[1]

"From LIBOURNE, this 30*th* of *July* 1585."

It is not a magnanimous letter ; and the real question debated between his critics and his apologists is whether he had quitted the city in selfish alarm, or whether the claims of his own family and dependants, who appear to have been in imminent danger from the same terrible visitation, justified him in the belief that he was more needed at home. The state of things on his own estate was frightful enough. The bodies of the peasantry were lying unburied in the fields and by the roadsides ; his lands were untilled, the grapes were rotting on the vines. It would appear that there were deaths amongst his own

[1] First printed by M. Detcheverry, 1850.

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household, since he says that "the pestilence assailed him both within his house and without." At any rate, he had to leave it, and, with his wife and family, to lead for some time a wandering life. Such was the panic caused by diseases against which the science of those days was helpless, that none of his friends seem to have been willing to give the party shelter.

"The sight of my own house was horrible to me. Everything there was left unprotected, at the mercy of any who coveted it. I, whose own nature is so hospitable, was in miserable distress to find a refuge for my family. A wandering household, we were causing terror to our friends and to ourselves, and a panic wherever we sought to settle, having to change our quarters the instant that any one's finger began to ache. All diseases at such times are taken for the plague—people do not give themselves time to discriminate."

"For six miserable months together," he continues, did he "serve as guide to this caravan." When he at last re-established himself at Montaigne, he found the whole neighbourhood devastated by the lawless bands of plunderers whom the civil wars had called into existence. He had his share of the perils to which all who have anything to lose are exposed in times of partisan warfare. He was careful—or rather, it was in accordance with his natural temperament and his sceptical philosophy—not to throw himself enthusiastically into the cause of either of the conflicting factions. He had no sympathy with Guise or the League: Henry of Navarre, as "Governor of the province of Guienne," and "Count of Perigord" —for these were amongst his titles—was, as it were, a neighbour, and had twice been entertained by him as a guest. In a kind of journal which he at one time

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attempted to keep, one of the few entries of much interest is a note of the first of these visits :—

"*Dec.* 19*th* 1584.—The King of Navarre came to see me at Montaigne, where he had never been before. He remained there two days, served by my people, without any of his own officers: he allowed no assay [against poison], and slept in my bed. [Here follows a list of the gentlemen in his suite, some forty-five in number, who all slept at the chateau, with their servants, and 'about as many others in the neighbouring villages.'] At the king's departure I had a stag started for him in my forest, which led him a chase of two days."[1]

There can be no doubt, though his expressions are cautious and guarded, and names are studiously omitted, that Montaigne rather admired Henry's character, and extended to him his personal sympathies. But Montaigne was a royalist on principle; and he could not actively espouse the cause of a prince who was in arms against his king. In fact, his enemies might have said he was too much inclined to serve two masters. He says of himself that he reaped the evil fruits of this moderation. "I was pillaged," he says, "by both parties: to the Ghibelline I was a Guelph, and to the Guelph a Ghibelline." Yet it certainly seems to have resulted in his making few personal enemies. Two adventures which befell him at this date may seem to illustrate his rather exceptional position. In those days, when no man's house or property was safe, one of the neighbouring seigneurs, well known to him, appeared one day at his gate on a jaded horse, and asked for shelter and protection. He had been attacked, he said, by an

[1] Bayle St John's Montaigne, II. 254.

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armed band of the enemy, his men defeated and dispersed, and himself hotly pursued. He was at once admitted, and hospitably entertained. Presently, at intervals, his retainers made their appearance in small parties of four or five, as men flying from a victorious enemy, until some five-and-twenty armed men on horseback filled the courtyard of Montaigne. They would not dismount, though their leader was drinking within; and then it flashed upon the owner that the surprise and plunder of his chateau had been planned. After some time, however, the commander of the party remounted his horse, and though his men seemed evidently expecting some very different signal, they filed quietly after him out of the yard. "He has since said, more than once (for he was not ashamed to tell the story), that my unsuspicious countenance and frank behaviour took the power of treachery out of his hands." On another occasion an ambush had been laid for him, and he found himself and his small party suddenly attacked by a number of gentlemen in visors, supported by a body of arquebusiers. They carried him into a neighbouring wood, robbed him of his horse and money, rifled his baggage, and demanded promise of a large ransom. There was even a proposal to kill him; but at last he was mounted on a sorry jade, separated from his retainers, and carried away prisoner. But they had gone but a very little way, when the leader rode back to him, gave him his liberty, and made search for such of his property as could be recovered and restored. He then pulled off his visor, disclosed his name, and assured his late prisoner that he was indebted for his release to his pleasant countenance and frank and undaunted address. Montaigne

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has woven these two personal anecdotes into his essay "On Physiognomy," as instances of the favourable impression often made by an open countenance and good expression—both of which he flattered himself he possessed.[1] But he admits that there was something, after all, in the circumstances of his last escape, which he could never thoroughly understand; and it is clear that we have not the true key to the unexpected turn in either case, unless it be that the character of the Sieur de Montaigne was so generally known and appreciated that even the marauding captains could not, when it came to the point, find it in their hearts to destroy the property or abuse the person of so inoffensive and kind-hearted a gentleman. He tells us that he had never seen fit, in spite of the dangerous condition of the country, to put his house in a state of defence. It was not strong enough to resist a regular attack, and he preferred not to appear to invite it; "I have no guard or sentinel," he says, "save the stars."

He found leisure and quiet enough, however, at some time during this unsettled period, to throw together the thirteen essays which make up the Third Book, and complete the collection as we now have it. He went to Paris to get it published, in 1588; and the title-page announces that no less than six hundred additions have

[1] There was probably much truth in this, if we may trust an anecdote which he tells in his essay "On the Force of Imagination" (I. 20). Simon Thomas, a celebrated physician of the time, one day met Montaigne, then quite a young man, at the house of an old and feeble patient, suffering from disease of the lungs. Thomas advised him to get his young friend to visit him often, that the sight of his fresh complexion, pleasant countenance, and vigorous health might possibly do him good by some process of assimilation. "He quite forgot," adds Montaigne, "that at the same time it might possibly do me harm."

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been made to the two first books. The quotations especially were greatly multiplied, sometimes to the overloading of the page. No other edition was published during the author's life.

He might, very possibly, but for his sincere dislike to such a position, have taken a more prominent part in the stirring events of his time; for we are told by De Thou that his influence with both Henry of Navarre and with Henry of Guise was sufficient to induce him, on one occasion, to make an attempt to reconcile them. He was known, however, as a steady if not energetic royalist, and once, at least, had the honour of suffering in the cause. While he was superintending the publication of his new edition in Paris, he was arrested and lodged in the Bastile by the Guise faction, in retaliation for a gentleman of the League having been imprisoned at Rouen by the King. His detention, however, lasted only a few hours, through the personal intercession with the Duke of Guise of the Queen-mother, Catherine de Medici. Montaigne's relations with her seem always to have been cordial and intimate, though the assertion of his having been her private secretary has arisen from the fact of that office having been really held by another person of the same name.

The assassination of Henry III., whose death without issue left the King of Navarre, his heir-presumptive, the legitimate claimant to the throne of France, released Montaigne from his somewhat ambiguous position. He wrote more than one letter to Henry IV., even before he was recognised by that title, from which it would appear that their private relations had always been of a friendly character, and that Henry was well aware of the real feel-

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ings of his correspondent. In one of these letters, dated on New Year's Day, 1590,[1] he thus expresses himself:—

"I have always foreseen for you the same high estate which you have now reached; and you may remember that, even when I should have had to confess it as a sin to my priest, I could not help looking upon your success with a favourable eye. Now I can welcome it fully and heartily, with more propriety and more freedom."

It does not appear that they ever met again. The king had asked the writer to visit him, and Montaigne hoped the meeting would be in Paris; but he died before Henry made his entry there. The last letter of his to the king which has been discovered is in reply to some request for his services in support of Marshal de Matignon. It concludes as follows:—

"Your Majesty will be pleased to do me so much justice as to believe that I shall never complain of my purse in a service in which I would not grudge my life. I have never yet made any gain from the liberality of kings,—which I have never solicited or deserved,—and have never received payment for anything I have done in their service, as your Majesty may partly be aware; and what I have done for your predecessors I will yet much more willingly do for yourself. I am, Sire, as rich as I wish to be. When I shall have drained my purse in your Majesty's service in Paris, I will make bold to say so; and then, if you think me worthy to be retained longer in your employ, you shall have me a cheaper bargain than the humblest of your officers."—[Sept. 2, 1590.]

Of the two remaining years of the Essayist's life we

[1] Discovered amongst the "Collection Dupuy" in the Imperial library at Paris, by M. A. Jubinal, so lately as 1850.

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know little or nothing: they were probably passed quietly in his country-house, in turning over and over again his favourite books in his library, correcting and enlarging his essays, or riding after his hounds, as he tells us in one of his later essays he continued to do, "with a youthful and reckless eagerness." He died of a quinsy, after a very few days' illness. The disease induced paralysis of the tongue: he was conscious that it was likely to prove fatal, and seems to have met his death with much calmness and presence of mind. The thoughtful kindness for his dependants that had always marked his character was shown in his last dispositions. He had already made his will; but when he found his case was hopeless, he got out of bed, put on his dressing-gown, and wrote a message to summon all the servants and others to whom he had bequeathed legacies. When they were assembled, he paid each the amount of the bequest,—"foreseeing they might have some difficulty in obtaining it from his heirs." Etienne Pasquier, who had been one of his most intimate friends, gives an account of his last moments. "He lay for three whole days in full possession of his senses, but without the power of speech; and for that reason he was obliged to have recourse to his pen to make his wishes known. And as he found his end drawing near, he begged his wife, in a little note, to have certain gentlemen his neighbours summoned, in order to bid them farewell. When they arrived, he had mass said in his chamber; and as the priest was in the act of elevating the Host, the poor gentleman sprang forward in his bed, as well as he could in his feeble state, with his hands clasped, and in that last act offered up

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his soul to God—a beautiful mirror of his inward feelings." [1]

So died the genial Essayist, in his sixtieth year, with few of the infirmities of age, and without much of the severe suffering at the last which he evidently so much dreaded. We may well believe that in spite of his many faults he was sincerely regretted. "I love, respect, and honour his memory," wrote his friend Pasquier, "more than that of any man." His *fille d'alliance*, Marie de Gournay, made a long and perilous journey across France to visit the sorrowing widow and daughter. "We have lost a great man," says Justus Lipsius, the celebrated scholar, in a Latin letter of condolence written to her on the occasion; adding an epigrammatic phrase of farewell highly Montaignesque in its character—"*Rideat ille nos, si sciat dolere*"—"He would laugh at us, if he knew that we were grieving for him."

Mademoiselle de Gournay at once undertook, at Madame de Montaigne's request, the supervision of a new and corrected edition of the Essays, which their author had all but arranged for publication when his labours were cut short by death. She spent fifteen months at the chateau in preparing this for the press, translating all the classical quotations, and revising the proofs herself. It was published in 1595, in folio, containing, according to the title-page, more than one-third more matter than any of the previous impressions; and still continues perhaps the finest and most authentic edition.

As he left no male heirs, he desired that his family arms should be borne by Pierre Charron, a theologian

[1] Letters of Etienne Pasquier, Book xviii. 1.

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and preacher of considerable repute, whose acquaintance he had first made in 1586, and with whom, during the last three years of his life, he had lived on terms of intimate friendship. It seems probable that his daughter Leonore's marriage had not turned out altogether to his satisfaction, if the following remark in one of his later essays be taken in connection with such an unusual legacy :—

"One of my wishes at this time would be to have a son-in-law who would kindly cherish my old age, and lull it gently to rest : in whose hands I might deposit, with full powers, the management and employment of my property, to do with it as I do myself, and receive from it what I receive, provided he would undertake it in a grateful and friendly spirit. But the fact is, we are living in an age when loyalty in one's own children is a thing unknown."—(III. 9.)

Charron was a great admirer of the Essays, and reproduced a good deal of their philosophy, in a hard and cold style, in his own volumes "On Wisdom," which had at one time no little popularity. Bayle considers that Montaigne's affection for his new friend was founded partly upon the same reasons as his attachment to Marie de Gournay. "No doubt," he remarks, "Charron's docility as a pupil contributed very much to Montaigne's affection for him." A "malicious" remark, M. Grün thinks it. Coming from Bayle, perhaps it is ; but it is not very unnatural or reprehensible if the sense of being appreciated has a strong influence on the personal feelings of an author.

His remains lay first at Montaigne, but were soon removed to the chapel of the Feuillans, now attached to the College at Bordeaux. There may still be seen his

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effigy in full armour, with long Latin and Greek inscriptions below. The municipal authorities of the city, in the days of the first Revolution, intending, as it would appear, to destroy or desecrate the chapel, in which case it would be no longer a safe resting-place for his ashes, declared by formal edict that "it was the duty of the Republic to take charge of them, and to honour the memory of the immortal author of the Essays;" and removed them with considerable ceremony to the hall of the Musée. The coffin was placed on a car drawn by four horses, and having inscribed on its sides sentences extracted from the Essays; a professor pronounced a public eulogium on their author; and the chief civil and military authorities, the professors of the several schools and their pupils, and the members of the learned and scientific societies, all accompanied this solemn republican translation. But it was afterwards discovered that the remains which had been the subject of all this ceremony were, after all, not those of Montaigne himself, but of some other member of the family: and in 1803 the body and the monument were restored, by the care of one of his descendants, to their old position in the chapel, where they still remain.

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CHAPTER V.

THE ESSAYS.

In any attempt to give, within the compass of a few pages, an idea of the spirit and character of the Essays of Montaigne, it is well to bear in mind, as a warning, what their author himself lays down in his celebrated essay on the "Art of Conversation"—that "every abridgment of a good book is a foolish abridgment." The only defence of such an attempt in the present case is, that Montaigne can scarcely be said to have written "a book" at all, and himself disclaims any such intention. We feel, as we read him, that we are in charming company; but he is rather the companion for an hour's delightful gossip, to which we return with fresh appetite from time to time, than the author to whose work we devote ourselves, from the first page to the last, with a continuous interest and attention. He is "the handbook for gentlemen in their leisure hours," says Huet: we can take him up and lay him down as we will. Nothing is more characteristic of his essays than their desultoriness. And this is intentional and conscious on the part of their author.

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"If I did not know myself so well, I might risk the attempting to treat of some subject thoroughly, and deceive myself as to my own incapacity. Throwing in as I do a word here and there, shreds of sundry patterns, scattered about without design or professed purpose, I am not bound to make good everything I say, or to keep strictly to my subject, without the liberty to change it when I please, and to give myself up to doubt and indecision, and to my ruling principle, which is professing to know nothing."—(I. 50.)

"For my own part, the very being tied to what I say is quite enough to loose me from it."

The author who speaks thus of his own work could hardly feel very indignant at its being read in somewhat the same irregular fashion as it was written. The very titles of his chapters often seem as though they had been adopted purposely to show on how slender a thread of that kind he could hang page after page of amusing discourse. The chapters "On Cripples" and "On Coaches" contain very little to satisfy the curious inquirer upon either subject: the essay "On Vanity" consists chiefly (perhaps not so very inappropriately) of the personal history of the Essayist himself. These titles, he confesses, "do not always comprehend the whole matter" (indeed very seldom); "they often denote it by some mark only:" and he is somewhat unreasonable in expecting his readers to follow him through all that curious chain of thought of which many of the connecting links existed only in the mind of the writer. He had read the "Phædra" of Plato, and greatly admired that "motley and fantastic composition," which began about love and then went off

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into rhetoric. He had found the same discursiveness in his beloved Plutarch :—

"There are treatises of his in which he forgets his theme; in which the subject of his discourse only shows itself incidentally, and is overlaid by foreign matter. Look at his manner in his 'Dæmon of Socrates.' Heavens! what sportive digressions! how charming the variety is! And then most of all when it seems undesigned and fortuitous. It is the careless reader that loses sight of my subject, not I; there will always be found in a corner some words to the purpose, though they lie very close."—(III. 9.)

But he not only treats in the same essay of half-a-dozen different things,—he returns sometimes again and again to the same subject in portions of different essays; detached fragments from his writings can hardly be more fragmentary reading than the Essays themselves: and in some cases it might be possible to piece together, out of their pages, scattered thoughts on the same subject which would present in appearance a more connected train of ideas than one of the longer essays as they stand.

This may serve as some apology for offering here, not the "abridgment" which Montaigne so strongly deprecated, and which the character of his own writings would least admit, but some such selection and arrangement of his thoughts and fancies as may at once serve to introduce them to readers to whom the Essays are little known, and tempt such to read further for themselves. It must be remarked, at the same time, that the author's antiquated French (abounding, as he confesses, with Gascon words and idioms, and with not a few Latinisms besides) presents occasional difficulties, and that the existing translations, of which Florio's perhaps still remains the best, are not always satisfactory.

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There is no need to follow the author's arrangement, which is purely arbitrary and accidental. Most of the passages in which he dwells on the incidents of his own life and on his personal habits have already been quoted in the preceding chapters. Let us begin here with the essay "On the Education of Children," thrown into the form of a letter to the author's friend and country-neighbour Diana de Foix, Countess of Garson, who was at that time expecting to give birth to a son and heir. Here, as in other cases, the writer talks of many things besides education; but what he does say on the subject is pertinent and sensible. His first point is the choice of a tutor.

"For a boy of good birth who aspires to letters, not with a view to gain, nor so much for any external advantages as for his own private benefit and to furnish and enrich his mind, having rather a desire to turn out a sensible man than a learned one, I would have his friends be careful to choose for him an instructor who has rather a well-balanced head than a well-filled one; and that, though both be required, they should look more for character and intelligence than for learning. And he should carry out his charge after a new fashion.

"Teachers are wont to be continually drumming into our ears, as if they were pouring into a funnel; while our part is to repeat what they have told us. I would have him correct this mistake; and that from the very first, according to the capacity of the pupil whom he has in hand, he should begin to put it to the test, by making him taste, choose, and discriminate things for himself; sometimes opening the way for him, sometimes leaving him to open it for himself. I would not have the tutor be always the one to originate an idea, or to speak; I would have him listen to what his pupil has to say in his turn. Socrates, and Arcesilaus after him, made their scholars talk first, and then talked to them.

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'The very authority of those who teach often stands in the way of those who are learning.'[1] It is good to make the pupil show his paces before him, so as to judge of his going, and how far the tutor must hold himself in check to accommodate his own pace to the other."

The advice which follows, though it be three hundred years old, is not too antiquated to apply still to some of our public schools:—

"Those who undertake, according to our present fashion, to instruct in the same lesson, and by one uniform method, a number of boys of such different intellects and capacities, need not wonder that amongst such a crowd of children they scarcely find two or three who carry away with them any real fruit of their teaching. Let them examine the pupil not only as to the words of the lesson, but in the sense and matter; and let them judge how far he has profited by it, not by the evidence of his memory, but of his mind. Let them make him put what he has just learned into a hundred different shapes, and fit it to so many different subjects, to see whether he has yet really taken it in and made it his own; judging of his progress as he goes, as in the Dialogues of Plato. It is a proof that we have not digested our food, if we throw it up just as we swallowed it: the stomach has not done its work, unless it has changed the form and the state of what we gave it to deal with."

He is no advocate for home education:—

"It is the universally received opinion that it is not judicious to bring up children in their parents' lap. Their natural affection makes even the most sensible of them too tender and indulgent; they are unable either to correct them for their faults, or see them brought up in hardihood and amongst some risks, as they ought to be. . . . Yet whoever would make a lad into a man good for anything, must unquestionably not spare him in his youth.

[1] Cicero de Nat. Deor., i. 5.

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. . . Besides, the authority of the tutor, which ought to be sovereign over him, is interrupted and hindered by the presence of the parents; added to which, the respect paid to the boy by all the household, and the knowledge of the wealth and greatness of his house, are in my opinion no slight disadvantages at that early age."

Montaigne objects, as we have seen already in his remarks on the French colleges, to corporal punishment, which was carried to a brutal excess in his day; but he is so far in accordance with one of the latest developments in our modern education, that he attaches high value to athletics:—

"Our very exercises and recreations should form an important part of our study—running and wrestling, music and dancing, hunting, the management of a horse and the handling of arms. I would have the boy's outward mien and behaviour, and the graceful carriage of his body, cultivated as well as his mind. It is not a body only, or a mind only, that we have to fashion; it is a man, and we must not divide him into two."

On another point, his views are in direct contrast to the somewhat luxurious habits affected of late by the English public-school-boy. Not a few readers may be of opinion that our school authorities might take a lesson from Montaigne:—

"Discourage in him all luxury and fastidiousness in his dress and lodging, in his eating and drinking: accustom him to all kinds, that he may turn out no fine gentleman or carpet-knight, but a hardy and vigorous young man. As a boy, as a man, and now in my old age, I have always thought and felt the same on this point."

We might be sure that he would have his young gentleman made, like himself, a citizen of the world, and

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raised above the pettiness and narrowness of mere national prejudices. He would have him learn from men as well as from books :—

"The great world is the mirror in which we must look, if we would really know ourselves. In short, I would have that to be my scholar's book. The great variety of humours, of sects, of judgments, of opinions, of laws and customs, teach us to judge soberly of our own, and lead our judgment to recognise its own imperfection and natural infirmity: and this is no mean apprenticeship. So many revolutions in states, and changes in the fortunes of nations, instruct us not to see so great a miracle in our own: so many names, so many victories and conquests buried in oblivion, make it ridiculous to hope to immortalise our own names by the capture of a dozen dragoons, or a paltry fort which is only remembered by its ruins."

Such a school can alone prevent his adopting the narrow views of the vulgar :—

"A man's judgment gains marvellous clearness of view by intercourse with the world; we all get contracted and congested in ourselves, and cannot see beyond the length of our nose. . . . When the vines get nipped with the frost in our village, my friend the priest concludes from it that Heaven is wroth with the whole human race, and that the pip has already got hold of the Cannibals. In looking at these civil wars of ours, who is not apt to exclaim that the machine of the universe is upset, and that the day of judgment is upon us? Never considering that many worse things have happened, and that in ten thousand other parts of the world people are enjoying themselves notwithstanding. For my part, considering the general licence and impunity, I am surprised to see so much moderation and forbearance. To the man who feels the hailstorm over his head, the whole hemisphere seems wrapped in storm and tempest.

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"Mere bookish knowledge is but a poor stock of knowledge indeed: I am content it should serve for embellishment, but not for a foundation. . . . For this reason, intercourse with men, and the visiting of foreign countries, are wonderfully useful: not merely to bring back, after the fashion of our young French nobility, an account of how many paces in circuit the Pantheon is, or of the richness of the dress worn by the Signora Livia; or, like some others, how much longer or broader Nero's face appears in some old ruin there than on such a particular medal: but to carry away from thence a general knowledge of the humours and manners of the people, and to whet and sharpen our own wits by rubbing them against those of others. I would have him begin to travel in his early years; and in the first place, in order to kill two birds with one stone, among the adjoining nations whose language differs most from our own, and to which our tongue will never bend itself unless we fashion it to the use betimes.

. . . . . .

"He should be advised, when in company, to have his eyes everywhere; for I find that the highest seats are commonly occupied by the least able men, and that the richest gifts of fortune are seldom accompanied by high abilities. I have known occasions when, while they were discussing at the top of the table the beauty of some tapestry, or the flavour of a particular Malvoisie, they were losing some excellent remarks at the other end. He should sound the special capabilities of every man—a cow-herd, a mason, any casual passenger;[1] he should make use of them all, and borrow from each according to his trade; for all will help to his instruction. The very stupidity and weakness of others will furnish him with lessons: by contrasting the good qualities

[1] Like other mentors, Montaigne failed sometimes to carry out his theories in his own practice: he confesses elsewhere that "he envies those who can find pleasure in chatting with a carpenter or a gardener."

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and the habits of all he meets, he will breed in himself an emulation of the good and a contempt of the evil.

"Let there be implanted in his mind an honest curiosity to inquire into everything. Whatever there be remarkable in his own neighbourhood, let him go to see it,—a building, a fountain, a person, the site of some ancient battle, the track of Cæsar or of Charlemagne. Let him inquire into the character, the revenues, and the alliances of this prince and of that; such things are very pleasant to learn, and very useful to know. In this converse with men I understand to be comprised, and principally, those who no longer live but in the records of history; by means of such records, he will be put in communication with the grand spirits of better ages. An unprofitable study he may make it, who so wills; but also, to him who so wills, it may be a study that bears invaluable fruit,—the only study, according to Plato, which the Lacedæmonians reserved for themselves. But let my instructor remember what end his office should have in view; and let him not impress upon his pupil so much the date of the fall of Carthage, as the characters of Hannibal and Scipio: nor so much the place where Marcellus died, as why it was a breach of duty for him to have died there. Let him not be taught the facts of history so carefully, as how to judge of them. In my opinion, it is the study to which of all others we apply ourselves in very different fashion. I have read in Livy a hundred things which another never saw there; Plutarch has read a hundred more things there than I have ever been able to find,—and possibly more than the author ever set down: to some, his work serves as a mere study of grammar; to others it is the very anatomy of philosophy, by which the most abstruse principles of human nature are investigated.

. . . . . .

"Let him eschew that pedantic and uncourteous habit, that puerile ambition of wishing to appear more refined than other people, something different from the rest of the world; nor, as though fault-finding and newfangled notions were accomplishments difficult to acquire, let him seek to derive a

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special reputation from these things. As it is the privilege of great poets only to avail themselves of the licences of their art, so it is intolerable that any but great and illustrious souls should claim the privilege of holding themselves above the ordinary habits of society. Singularity and oddity of every kind in our character and habits are to be avoided, as opposed to the rules of good society."

He repeats this in another essay :—

"The worst quality in a gentleman is fastidiousness, and the being tied to a certain particular way; and it is particular, if it be not pliable and adaptive."

He ranks a scientific and technical education far below that which we call (and, as he would contend, justly) a liberal one. And, as we might readily foresee, his idea of the root of a liberal education is the study of moral philosophy :—

"It seems to me that the first teaching with which we ought to imbue his mind should be that which is to regulate his morals and his feelings ; which shall teach him to know himself, and to know how to live well and to die well. Amongst the liberal arts, let us begin with that which makes us free ; they all serve, no doubt, in their degree, to the ordering and employment of our life, as everything else does also, in some sort: but let us make choice of that which serves to that end directly and professedly. 'Tis great foolishness to teach our children the knowledge of the stars and the motions of the eighth sphere before we teach them the knowledge of themselves."

And after insisting upon it that children are never too young to learn at least the elements of this knowledge, and that the lessons of moral philosophy are not more difficult for the youthful student than the subtleties of logic or the problems of geometry—"things by which our

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lives can never be mended"—he adds these striking words:—

"To our young scholar, his closet or the garden, his table and his bed, solitude or company, morning and evening,—all hours shall be alike, all places shall serve him for study: for philosophy, which, as being that which moulds our judgments and our characters, will be his principal lesson, has the privilege of mingling itself with everything."

He is to be early taught also to form an independent judgment, and to take nothing on trust. In fact, Montaigne would have his young gentleman something of a Pyrrhonist, like himself:—

"Let him be made to sift and examine everything, and to give nothing a place in his head upon mere authority and credit. Let the principles of Aristotle be no more principles to him than the principles of Epicurus or of the Stoics: let this diversity of opinions be laid before him; he will make his choice among them, if he has the strength: if not, he will continue in doubt. For if he embraces the opinions of Xenophon and Plato of his own proper judgment, then these opinions will be no longer theirs but his own: he who follows another, follows nothing: he finds nothing, because he seeks nothing. Let him at least know what he knows. His business is to imbibe their knowledge, not to adopt their dogmas: let him forget by all means, if he chooses, where he got his principles, provided he knows how to use them for himself."

He would have his youth of noble birth loyal and chivalrous, but not of the courtier type:—

"If his tutor be of my humour, he will form his disposition to be a very loyal subject to his prince, very devoted to his person, and brave in his service: but he will discourage in him any wish to attach himself to him by any other tie than that of public duty. Independently of other draw-

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backs inconsistent with our liberty, which arise from such private obligations, a man's judgment is as it were pledged and purchased: it is either less free and independent, or incurs the charge of imprudence or ingratitude. He who is purely a courtier has neither the liberty nor the will to speak or think otherwise than favourably of a master who, among so many thousand others of his subjects, has chosen him for advancement and promotion at his own hand. Such favours and advantages, not without some reason, corrupt our independence and dazzle our view. So we commonly find the language of such persons different from the language of any other class in the state, and carrying very little credit with it in such matters."

To conclude these extracts from an essay which will repay thorough and careful reading, and from which later writers (notably Rousseau in his 'Emile') have drawn largely, let us take the "short method" in which the author would deal with a wilful and hopeless pupil:

"If the pupil should turn out to be of such a contrary disposition, that he loves better to listen to a foolish story than to the narrative of some interesting travel, or to a rational discussion; that at the sound of a drum that stirs the youthful ardour of his companions he will turn to follow another that calls to their tricks a troop of mountebanks; if in his heart he does not find it more pleasant and delightful to return covered with dust and glory from the field of battle, than from the tennis-court or the games in which he has carried off the prize;—I can find no other remedy for such a case but that he be bound apprentice to a pastry-cook in some respectable town, were he the son of a duke."

In the copy which the author left with corrections in his own handwriting, the method recommended is shorter and sharper still: "That his tutor strangle him in good time, *if he can do so without witnesses:* or other-

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wise put him apprentice." M. Naigeon has thus printed the passage in his edition of 1802.

No one can fail to recognise, in the principles of education sketched out in this essay, the essential points of the training of a gentleman in the true sense of the word. If some of the suggestions should seem to the wisdom of our nineteenth century trite and commonplace, let us bear in mind that they were put on paper three hundred years ago. How many steps have we made in advance since their date, in real education? and how many even of these have been made within the present century? Had English education, a hundred years ago, approached in principle or practice to anything like the ideal of Montaigne?

One grave omission will be remarked. Not a word is breathed of any religious principle or duty to be inculcated,—any religious foundation on which morality is to rest. In the great issues of life, philosophy is to be the only guide. As to anything higher than that, Montaigne is silent, because he has nothing to teach. If the intelligent pupil should question him on that great subject, he could only answer in the words of his motto, "*Que sais-je?*"

The essay which has generally been considered as the author's masterpiece is that on "The Art of Conversation," which was one of his last written, and stands eighth in the Third Book. Pascal has called it "incomparable," and his judgment of Montaigne is, to say the least, not partial. The chapter is discursive, like nearly all the rest: if it teaches the art of conversation at all, it is by the example of how a good talker may handle, with

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a light and sparkling touch, a dozen subjects strung together by the very slenderest thread of connection. But it is not really what we call "conversation" which he here discusses, though in that art we may be sure that Montaigne was a proficient. The essay is rather the laying down of certain rules and principles on which an intellectual argument or discussion (which Montaigne declares he loved) should be conducted, in order to secure at once free expression of opinion and command of temper—to show how gentlemen may dispute without thinking it necessary to quarrel.

"The most fruitful and natural exercise of the mind, to my thinking, is converse with others: I find the practice more delightful than any other action of our life; and it is the reason why, if at this moment I were forced to make the choice, I would rather consent, I do believe, to lose my sight, than to lose my power of hearing and speaking. The Athenians, and yet more the Romans, held this exercise in high honour in their schools; in our own times, the Italians retain some traces of it, to their great advantage, as one may see if one compares their conversation with ours. The study of books is but a weak and languishing excitement, which fails to warm us, while conversation teaches us and exercises us both at once. If I converse with a man of vigorous intellect and an able fencer, he thrusts me in the sides, he gives me point right and left; his thoughts draw out mine; jealousy, glory, antagonism, urge and rouse me to something above myself; unanimity is a quality altogether tiresome in conference. But inasmuch as our minds are strengthened by collision with other vigorous and well-regulated minds, so 'tis not to be expressed how much they lose and degenerate by the perpetual contact and association with minds that are frivolous and weak: no contagion spreads like that: I know by long experience how much it is all worth a yard. I love disputation and argument; but it is only with a few persons,

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and for my own entertainment only: for to serve as a spectacle to the great, and to make a parade of one's wit and fluency and powers of conversation, I hold to be a very unbecoming part for a man of honour. . . .

"I engage in argument and discussion with great ease and freedom, since opinions find in me a very bad soil to strike deep into or take firm root. No propositions astonish me, and no belief offends me, however opposite it may be to my own. There is no fancy so frivolous or extravagant as not to seem to me a natural product of the human mind. . . . Contradiction of my opinion, therefore, neither offends me nor puts me out; it only rouses me and puts me on my mettle. We shrink from having our judgment challenged: we ought rather to court and lay ourselves out for it, especially when it comes in the form of argument and not dictation. Whenever we are contradicted, we are apt to consider not whether the contradiction be just, but how we are to get the better of it, right or wrong: instead of opening our arms to it, we thrust out our claws. I could bear to be even roughly handled by my friends—'You are an ass,—you are dreaming.' I love plain and bold speech between gallant men, and that our words should go along with our thoughts; we must harden our ears, and steel ourselves against that over-tenderness as to ceremonious language. I like a companionship and converse that are vigorous and manly, a friendship that prides itself on the keenness and vigour of its intercourse, even by biting and scratching, as in love: it is not strong and generous enough if it be civilised and formal, if it fears all rough shocks, and walks with mincing steps. When a man opposes me, he awakes my attention, not my anger. I approach him that contradicts me as him that instructs me: the cause of truth ought to be the common cause of both of us. But how will he answer? The passion of anger will have already marred his judgment: wrath has taken possession of him instead of reason. It would be a very good thing to refer the decision of such disputes to a wager; that there should be some material evidence of our defects, to the end that we might

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the better remember them; and that my servant might be able to say to me—'Your ignorance and obstinacy have cost you in this last year, on twenty several occasions, a hundred crowns.' For my part, I welcome and embrace truth in whosesoever hands I find it, and submit to it cheerfully, nay, hold out my arms to it in token of submission, as soon as I see it approaching in the distance; and, provided always it does not take an imperious and dictatorial tone, I take pleasure in being set right, often rather on grounds of civility than conviction, because I love to gratify and encourage the liberty of admonition by my readiness to give way, even to my own cost.

"It is very difficult, nevertheless, to win the men of my day to this way of thinking. They have not the courage to correct, because they have not the courage to bear to be corrected: and they always speak with insincerity in each other's presence. I take such pleasure in being judged and criticised, that I am indifferent in which of the two fashions it be done. My own fancies contradict and refute themselves so often, that it is all the same to me if some one else does it,—especially as I concede to his authority only just so much as I please. But I fall out at once with any who deal in such high-handed fashion (as I know some who do) as to resent their assertions not being implicitly believed, and take it as an affront if one makes any difficulty in accepting them. . . . In truth, I prefer meeting in discussion with those who hit me hard, than with those who are afraid of me. It is a poor and unwholesome satisfaction to have to deal with those who admire us and pay us deference. . . . I feel much prouder of the victory I gain over myself, when in the very heat of the dispute I make myself bend to the force of my opponent's reasoning, than of any victory I may gain over him through his weakness. In short, I can receive and bear any kind of attack that is made directly and fairly, however weak it be; but I am too impatient of those which are made in irregular fashion. I never heat myself as to the matter of the argument: to me all opinions are the same,

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and I am almost indifferent to victory on any question. I can argue with good temper for a day together, provided the argument be conducted in a regular way; it is not ability or cleverness I look for, so much as orderly and pertinent discussion. I mean that kind of pertinency which we always see in the disputes of country-people and shop-boys, never amongst ourselves: if they get violent, that is only rudeness,—so do we too; but their noise and impatience never turns them from their subject, their assertions keep to the point; if they interrupt each other, if they will not listen, at any rate they understand each other. A man always answers me well enough, if he does but answer what I say: but when the dispute becomes disorderly and confused, I leave the thing; and I insist upon observance of form with some degree of anger and impatience, and so fall into a stubborn, bitter, and masterful style of disputing, which I have to blush for afterwards. It is impossible to deal fairly with a fool. It is not only my judgment which gets warped in contest with such an irrational opponent, but my conscience too.

"Our disputes ought to be put under restrictions and penalties, like other offences of the tongue: what mischief do they not breed and encourage, governed and directed as they always are by passion! We quarrel first with the arguments, and then with the men. We learn to argue only that we may contradict; and every one contradicting and being contradicted, it follows therefrom that the result of argument is the loss and annihilation of truth."

It is the pleasure of finding himself matched with a skilful and vigorous opponent, a master of his art, and who always fights fair, that Montaigne appreciates, and which, in his view, alone makes argument a valuable intellectual exercise. The question as to which opponent has the best of it is little to the purpose, provided the bout be well and fairly fought on both sides. He knew well enough, as we all know, that men are very

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rarely convinced by argument, and are not much nearer the truth after it than before.

"The excitement and the chase of our quarry is the true sportsman's part: we are not to be excused if we follow it clumsily and against the rules of the field. To fail to catch our game is quite another matter; for we are born to make the quest of truth,—to possess it belongs to a higher power. The world is but a tilting-school of inquiry: it is not who shall carry off the ring, but who shall run the best career. He may play the fool who asserts what is true, as well as he that asserts what is false; for we are here treating not of the matter but the manner of an argument."

He had some experience of those pompous and arrogant gentlemen who consider that their wealth, or rank, or reputation supply them with sufficient and material arguments in support of any assertion or opinion they may be pleased to make,—who say to society in general—

"I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark."

He would not have cared to argue with Sydney Smith's "country gentlemen, who talk in a landed manner." Against such throwing of social weight into the scales of discussion he vigorously protests:—

"If they condescend to ordinary discussion, and you offer them anything except approbation and respect, they crush you with the authority of their experience: they have heard, they have seen, they have done so and so; you are overwhelmed with examples. . . . I hate tyranny in every shape—in speech as in act; I take up arms at once against all extrinsic circumstances which tend to bias our judgment by means of our senses. And when I set myself to watch these extraordinary authorities carefully, I find that they are, for

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the most part, flesh and blood, like other people. Possibly we even regard and appreciate them as less than they are, because they attempt more, and put themselves more prominently forward, and do not answer to the pretensions they make. There ought to be more force and weight in the bearer than in the burden; he who has not put forth all his power, leaves you to divine that he has yet more power in reserve, if he were to exert himself to the full extent. He who sinks under his burden, discovers the measure of his strength and the weakness of his shoulders. This is why we see so many foolish people amongst the learned,—more of them than of the other sort. They might have made good farmers, good merchants, good artisans; their natural capacities were cut out to that measure. Knowledge is a heavy weight, and they faint under it."

The world is only too ready to take its estimate of a man's ability from his rank and position:—

"It only needs for us to see a man promoted to some dignity, and though we knew him but three days before for a man of little mark, there grows before our view insensibly a figure of enlarged capacity; and we persuade ourselves that, because his suite and his importance has increased, his merits have increased also: we reckon him not according to his value, but as we do counters, according to the prerogative of his place. Let fortune take such a turn as that he falls again and subsides into the crowd, everybody asks himself in wonder what it was that raised him so high in estimation: 'Is this he?' they say. 'Did he know no more than this when he was in office? Do princes content themselves with so little? Pretty hands we were in, truly!' . . . What I worship myself in kings is the crowd of their worshippers: all reverence and submission is due to them, save that of the understanding; it is not my reason which is bound to bend and bow to them—it is only my knees."

He sees the enormous advantage which rank and position give, not only in the estimate which society

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will form of a man's abilities, but in the very facility which it gives him of putting forth his best with ease and confidence, with the assurance of its being appreciated. It is this which makes women (though Montaigne would possibly not have allowed it) such ready and pleasant talkers, when they have any intelligence at all: they are sure of a deferential and appreciative listener.

"Consider what an advantage it is to a man to speak just when he pleases—to choose his opportunity, to interrupt or change the subject with an authority none will dispute; to defend himself from the objections of others by a nod, by a smile, or by silence, in the presence of a circle that thrills with deference and respect."

On the other hand, he does not care to argue with fools. If you try to set them right, either they are obstinate, or they say, "That was exactly what I meant, only I did not know how to express it."

"As for assertions made ordinarily, in the course of conversation, I never set myself to refute them either by word or sign, however false or absurd they may be."

It would save considerable waste of words and disturbing of tempers in daily society, if we were more ready to adopt in this respect the self-denying ordinance of Montaigne.

It has been seen that, in his views on education, Montaigne looks upon philosophy as the master-science. But philosophy as he finds it, even amongst his favourite Greeks and Romans, is very far from satisfying him. The leaders of ancient thought, he finds, do but contradict each other. No two sects—and he has learnt from Varro that there are no less than two hundred and

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eighty-eight—agree among themselves what is the "sovereign good," or wherein lies the essential distinction between vice and virtue. His own school of thought and belief he does not tell us so in actual words, but it is written on almost every page of the Essays, as well as on the rafters of his library, is that of Pyrrho—"whose profession is to oscillate, to doubt, to inquire, to feel sure of nothing, to make one's self responsible for nothing." This is, in his eyes, the essence of human wisdom; and he seems to insinuate that even Socrates and Plato were Pyrrhonists at heart. But the philosophy which he really values, and which he would fain both teach and learn, is practical; and it is that which can teach us how to meet death. This forms the subject of one of his best and most serious essays—"That to study philosophy is to learn to die."[1] He takes his text from Cicero, who again does but translate from the 'Phædo' of Plato. The proposition laid down at the outset of the essay might seem, at first sight, strangely chosen to prove his conclusion—"Let philosophers say what they will, the final end we all have in view, even in virtue itself, is pleasure." The pleasure which the Stoic takes in being strong enough to resist the pleasures of sense is only pleasure of a higher kind. And they are wrong, he argues, who assert that the quest of virtue is indeed difficult and disagreeable, but that virtue when attained is pleasant: who *does* attain it?

"They are wrong; seeing that of all the pleasures we know, the pursuit itself is pleasant. The attempt must needs have a savour of the quality of that to which it is directed; for it is a component part of the result, and of the

[1] I. 19.

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same essential nature. The happiness and blessedness which shines in virtue illumines all its avenues and approaches, from the first entrance to the last inner-gate."

Seldom, even in the writings of graver philosophers, has a noble conception been clothed in language so brief and picturesque.

The highest blessing that virtue can confer upon us, the author contends, is the contempt of death. If philosophy teaches us to despise poverty, or pain, or sorrow, it is well. But some men's lives such accidents touch but little; and at the worst, from all of them death will relieve us. It is death only which comes inevitably to all men. If we tremble at it, "how can we advance a single step in life without an ague-fit?" he asks. "The remedy of the vulgar is not to think about it at all;" "most people cross themselves at the very word, as though it were the name of the Devil."

He rambles off to string together a score of instances of sudden or unexpected death, ancient and modern (reminding the reader here, as in many other places, of Burton's style in his 'Anatomy'), to illustrate the commonplace that death has no respect of ages or persons. Then he proposes to himself and to his readers a remedy against the fear of death quite contrary to the habit of the vulgar.

"Let us disarm him of his strangeness: let us converse with him, grow familiar with him; let us have nothing so often in our thoughts as death, let us continually represent him to our imagination under all possible shapes: at the stumbling of a horse, at the fall of a tile, at the prick of a pin, let us straightway think—'Well! supposing it had been death itself!' and thereupon encourage and fortify ourselves against it. In our feasts and revels, let there ever-

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more occur to us, as a refrain, the thought of our condition; and never let us be so far carried away by pleasure, but that it cross our recollection from time to time in how many ways this very enjoyment lays us open to death, and with how many snares it threatens us."

For his own part, he declares that, but for thus accustoming himself to the thought, he should live in perpetual terror: "Never man was so distrustful of his life, yet never was man so indifferent as to its duration." He relates that once, when he was "within a league of his own house, and merry and well," he wrote down at once a memorandum of something he wished done after his death, because he did not feel sure he should live to get home. As for preparation, the words that follow contain a sadder truth, perhaps, than the writer knew:—

"I am at all times prepared as much as I am like to be, and the coming of death will teach me nothing new. We should always, so far as in us lies, be booted and spurred, and ready to set off, and above all, take care that at that moment we have no business to do for any but ourselves; for we shall then have work enough to do of our own, without any addition. We hear one man complain, not so much of death, as that it robs him of the carrying out of a glorious victory; another because he has to quit life before he has married his daughter, or arranged for the education of his children; one grieves at parting from his wife, another from his son, as the chief blessings of his existence. I am at this moment, God be praised, in such a position that I can quit when He pleases, without regrets for anything. I keep myself disengaged on all sides; my farewells are soon taken of all but myself. Never was man prepared to quit the world more absolutely and entirely, and detach myself from it more completely than I expect to do. The deadest deaths are the best. We are born for action: I would have a man

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act and go on with the duties of life so long as he is able; and then, let death find me planting my cabbages, but not concerned at his approach, and still less that I am leaving my garden unfinished."[1]

Death has not such terrors for him, he finds, in sickness, as when he is in health: and even sickness is worse in anticipation than in reality.

"The cheerful spirit, the vigour of body, and the enjoyment of life which I feel now, cause the contrary estate to appear in such strong contrast with the present, that in imagination I make its inconveniences twice as formidable as they really are, and represent them to myself as heavier than I may find them when I have them on my shoulders. I hope it will be the same with me as to death.

. . . . . .

"Observe, in all the ordinary changes and declinations we undergo, how nature hides from us the sight of our loss and decay. What remains to an old man of the vigour of his youth and of past days? I do not believe we should be able to endure such a change if it came upon us all at once; but nature leads us by the hand little by little down a gentle and imperceptible slope, step by step, and so lowers us into that wretched state, and accustoms us to it.[2] So that we feel no shock when youth dies in us, though this is in essence and reality a harder death than the final dissolution of a feeble body, which is nothing more than the death of old age."

Then follows some moralising, chiefly founded on the

[1] The well-known preacher, Robert Hall, was one day paying a pastoral visit to a baker, who apologised for having been caught in his shirt-sleeves, covered with flour. "Never mind, my friend," said Hall; "if the Great Judge should come to-morrow, I hope He may find you in the same state." The man looked shocked. "I mean," said Hall, "busy in the honest work of your calling."

[2] "A long sickness seems to have been placed between life and death, in order that death itself may become a relief both to those who die and to those who are left."—La Bruyère.

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latter part of the Third Book of Lucretius, on death as the necessary and fitting completion of the course of nature; and the essay closes thus:—

"I have often asked myself why, since death is the same in all cases, it should be met with more courage by peasants and men of low condition than by others. I verily believe it is the frightful ceremonies and apparatus with which we surround it that terrify us more than the thing itself; the entire change in our manner of life; the wailing of mothers, wives, and children; the visits of startled and afflicted friends; a number of servants standing round us pale and weeping; daylight shut out of our chamber, and tapers lighted; our bedside besieged by physicians and preachers; in short, every possible ghastliness and horror gathered round us;—why, we seem dead and buried already. Children are afraid of their best friends when they see them with masks on; and so it is with us. We must strip the mask from things as well as persons: take that away, and we shall find beneath but that same death, which a valet or simple chamber-maid passed through but just now without fear. Happy is the death that leaves us no leisure for such ceremonies and preparations."

He professes himself elsewhere of Cæsar's opinion, that "the death most to be desired is that which is the least premeditated, and the shortest. If Cæsar dared to say it, it is no cowardice in me to believe it."[1] It is remarkable, when we consider Montaigne's apparently cheerful and sanguine temperament, how continually he seems to have kept the thought of death before his eyes. Had he really so far accustomed himself to it as to look it boldly in the face, and did his philosophy succeed in stripping it of its terrors for him? Or is this anxiety which he seems to show for a comparatively

[1] II. 13.

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sudden death,—for dying alone and among strangers,—rather the betrayal of a nervous dread than the evidence of a philosophical calm? We find the subject handled in other essays again and again. He is writing on the text, "Use makes perfect:"—

"But in dying, which is the greatest work we have to do, practice can give us no help. A man may fortify himself by habit and experience against pain, against shame, against poverty, and such other accidents of life: but, so far as death is concerned, we can none of us experience it but once, and we are all but apprentices when we come to it. There have been those in old times who had such command of themselves that they have sought in the very hour of death to taste and try it, and summoned together all their powers of mind to discover what this passage is: but never have any come back to tell us the news."[1]

As to the place and manner of his death, he tells us that he never entered an inn, when on his travels, without asking himself whether he could be taken ill and die there comfortably.[2] He did not care to die at home.

"If I were to have my choice, it should be on horseback rather than in bed, out of my own house, and away from my family. There is more of heart-breaking than consolation in taking leave of one's friends. I would willingly omit that duty of politeness: for of all the offices of friendship, that is the only unpleasant one, and so I would gladly forget to wish a last and eternal adieu.

. . . . . .

"I would be well content with a death withdrawn into itself; quiet and solitary, all my own, suited to my quiet and

[1] He instances afterwards the anecdote of Canius Julius, told by Seneca, *De Tranquillitate.*

[2] It may be remembered that Archbishop Leighton—a very different man from Montaigne—wished to die at an inn.

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retired life. I have enough to do to console myself, without having to console others: enough thoughts already in my head, without having new thoughts forced upon me by surrounding circumstances: enough matter to occupy myself, without borrowing from others. This scene does not belong to the *rôle* of society—it must be played by one character alone. Let us live and laugh among our friends; let us go die and sulk among strangers. A man may find, by paying for it, some one to turn his head and chafe his feet, who will not trouble him more than he likes, but meet him always with an indifferent countenance, and let him manage himself and grumble as he chooses."—(III. 9.)

The suffering induced from time to time by his disease, which had made death appear very near to him more than once, had probably led his thoughts to dwell upon it more than we should have expected from a man of his lively temperament. He tried to persuade himself that he had steeled himself against its terrors by philosophy, but he honestly confesses that if it were possible to escape it, "even by getting into a calf-skin," he would gladly do so.[1] And he says again:—

"I can regard death with indifference, when I look at it in the general as the end of life. I can vaunt over it in the gross, but it beats me in detail. The tears of a servant, the disposition of my wardrobe, the touch of a well-known hand, a commonplace word of consolation, melts me and breaks me down."—(III. 4.)

There is an expression in his diary of travel which might seem to imply that at one time, under great bodily suffering, the idea of suicide had suggested itself to his mind. He there says that for such suffering there are

[1] I. 19. "And hang a calf-skin on those recreant limbs."—Shaksp., "King John," Act iii. sc. 1.

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but two remedies; either to resolve to bear it like a man, or to end it promptly and courageously. Yet elsewhere, when he speaks of pain having helped to lessen his love of life, he adds—"God grant that in the end, if its sharpness grow beyond my powers of endurance, it do not drive me into the other not less vicious extreme, of longing and desiring to die!"[1] His admiration of heathen philosophy — especially of Seneca, who, both in precept and example, might be called the apostle of suicide—had made such an idea familiar to him, and he has devoted an essay (under the fanciful title of "The Custom of the Island of Cea") to the discussion of the arguments on both sides. Pascal and others have seen in it nothing less than an apology for suicide. He certainly dwells with apparent admiration on those historical instances in which men have preferred death to utter misery or to dishonour: and of his "Three good Women" (II. 36), two commit suicide with their husbands, and the third attempts it. But his own opinion—not without visible hesitation—seems to be summed up in these words:—

"There is more courage in bearing the chain by which we are bound than in breaking it, and more evidence of fortitude in Regulus than in Cato."—(II. 3.)

As to anything beyond death, Montaigne is silent. There comes no voice for him out of the cloud, and there is no cry of inquiry on his part. "The deadest deaths are the best"—that is the sum of his feelings, so far as he expresses them. He would have his last moments calm: but whether it is the calmness of the Stoic, the Material-

[1] II. 37.

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ist, or the Christian, cannot be with certainty gathered from any word of his. To this subject, however, we shall have to recur hereafter.

As a counterpart to his praise of Philosophy, Montaigne could have given us, like Erasmus, an "Encomium on Folly:" and such an essay could readily be gathered from his pages. He saw, as the wisest men do, its very considerable advantages in practical life. It is "not men's follies," as he says, "that make him laugh, but their wisdom." Take the following extracts from that curious monologue which he has entitled "An Apology for Raymond Sebond:"—

"Would you have a man in sound health, regular in his habits, and in a firm and secure position? Muffle him up in the shades of sloth and dulness. We must become animals in order to become wise, and be blindfolded before we can be led. And if you tell me that the advantage of having one's sense of pain and evil cold and dull, brings with it the disadvantage of being consequently less sensible and keen in the enjoyment of blessings and pleasures, this is true enough. But it follows from the wretchedness of our condition that we have not so much to enjoy as to escape from, and that the supremest pleasure does not touch us so keenly as a trifling pain. We are not nearly so sensible of perfect health as of the slightest illness. Our being well is only the negation of being ill. This is the reason why that school of philosophy which sets the highest value upon pleasure has yet ranged it under the category of the absence of pain. The having no evil is to have the greatest good that man can hope for, as Ennius says—

'Too much of good hath he who hath no ill.'

. . . . . .

I say, then, that if simpleness leads us to the point of being

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free from ills, it leads us to the happiest state compatible with our condition.

"'Tis a great advantage, to the honour of ignorance, that knowledge herself throws us back into its arms, when she finds herself puzzled how to fortify us against the presence of misfortunes. She is constrained to come to this compromise,—to throw us up the reins, and give us leave to take refuge in the other's bosom, and to shelter ourselves under its protection against the blows and insults of fortune. For what else does she mean, when she preaches to us to draw off our thoughts from the ills which beset us, and to entertain ourselves with the thought of vanished pleasures, and to employ as a consolation for the evils of the present the recollection of the happiness of the past?

. . . . . .

"We meet with many similar precepts, in which we are permitted to borrow from the vulgar such poor shadows of comfort, when reason, however strong and lively, cannot supply our need, provided only that they minister to us content and consolation."

In a somewhat more serious vein he appeals to the text of Ecclesiastes, that "in much wisdom there is much grief;" and to the contrast drawn by St Paul (though here his verbal quotation is of the vaguest) between an honest ignorance and self-sufficient knowledge; and reminds his readers that the longing for knowledge led to the ruin of mankind.

In subsequent essays he strikes the same note:—

"If we judge by their practical utility, and by the simple truth, the lessons of ignorance are not much behind those which learning teaches on the other hand. Men differ in feelings and in powers: and one must lead them to their own good after their own fashion, and by different roads. I never saw any peasant among my own neighbours set himself to cogitate with what countenance and assurance he

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should meet his last hour. Nature teaches him not to dream about death until he is dying; and then he does it with a better grace than Aristotle, on whom death presses doubly hard, both because of itself and because of the long anticipation of it. . . .

"'Tis only your learned men who dine any the worse for the thought of it when they are in full health, and who shudder at the idea of death. Your common man has no need of remedy or consolation until the actual shock of the blow comes, and thinks no more about it than just what he suffers. Is it not then as we say, that the stupidity and want of sensibility of the common folk gives them that patience under present evil, and that profound indifference to the misfortunes that may befall them in the future,—that their spirits, being denser and more obtuse, are less sensitive and excitable? For heaven's sake, if it be so, let us open a school of stupidity at once. The utmost fruit that the sciences promise us, is but the result to which this leads its scholars so gently."—(III. 12.)

"Most of the faculties of the soul, as we commonly use them, rather trouble the repose of our lives than promote it in any degree."—(II. 37.)

He remarks again, and we must admit with very great truth, how thoroughly satisfied fools are with themselves and their performances, and how commonly "their confident language and self-satisfied air gives them the advantage in the opinion of the audience, who are usually weak, and incapable of forming a correct judgment, or of discerning the true bearings of the question."[1] "Nothing provokes him so much," he says, "in folly, as that it is more pleased with itself than reason can ever reasonably be." While he confesses that he himself shares largely in that grand discontent which longs for change and motion—the "*ennui* which fools never

[1] III. 8.

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feel, and which clever men only dispel by active exertion" [1]—he sees that there is a lower form of happiness which may suffice for smaller souls.

"Those who make up their minds to value what they have themselves above everything else, and to think there can be nothing more beautiful than what they see before them, are surely happier than we are, if not so well-informed. I do not envy them their wisdom,—but I do their good-luck." [2]—(III. 9.)

Fools have in fact, he has noticed, more luck in life than other people—"Fortune, seeing that she could not make them wise, has made them lucky."

He has read in Seneca that "we may be guilty of intemperance in learning, as in everything else;" and he comments on the text with an amusing cynicism.

"I have been delighted to see, in some places, men taking upon them vows of ignorance, by way of devotion, as they would of chastity, or poverty, or penitence. This too is a chastening of our irregular appetites,—to restrain that greediness which spurs us on to the study of books, and to debar the mind of that voluptuous self-complacency which tickles us with the conceit of our own knowledge: and it is a rich complement of the vow of poverty to add to it poverty of mind."—(III. 12.)

Illusions and hallucinations may contribute more to our happiness than the most consummate wisdom. There are a good many philosophers who would be of

[1] The late Lord Lytton.

[2] This is, in fact, very much what Erasmus says, in his "Praise of Folly:" "How admirable is Nature's solicitude to make all men equally happy in their great variety of conditions! Her gifts are in themselves not sufficient for this: there must be a little addition to them—the gift of Self-esteem. A little addition, do I say? Nay, this gift of Self-esteem is all in all."

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the same mind, Montaigne thinks, as the man in Horace, who had long been a harmless and happy monomaniac, under the delusion that he was always sitting in the theatre enjoying the most splendid and entertaining spectacles; and who, when restored to sanity by the care of his friends and physicians, threatened them with a lawsuit for having destroyed the happiness of his life.[1]

Selfish as we may admit him to have been in many things, there are yet points in which Montaigne's human sympathies stand out, to his eternal credit, far in advance of his age, and in strong contrast with its hard and narrow principles. The Gascon gentleman could at least appreciate, as we moderns have but gradually learned to appreciate, the patience of the poor. One of the worst curses of the old feudal system was that it ignored not only the liberties but the feelings of the humbler classes. To the nobility of that sixteenth century the slaves of the soil were only the instruments which cultivated their lands, and from whom they drew their yearly revenues. They were the body from which kings wrung their taxes, and the material they employed in war. If such beings had human hearts and human affections, these were no more within the cognisance of society than the mutual relations of the beasts of the field. It was not so with Montaigne. Keen observer as he was of life in all its aspects, his continued residence at his country chateau gave him opportunities of noting the habits and character of the peasantry. He recognised there the presence of a philosophy of another kind than that of the schools.

[1] Hor. Epist., II. 2.

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"Why should we go on fortifying ourselves with the aspirations of science? Let us look down upon the earth: the poor people whom we see scattered there, with heads bowed down to their work, who know nothing of Aristotle or Cato, of example or precept,—from them does nature draw forth day by day results of firmness and patience more pure and abiding than those which we study so curiously in the schools. How many of them do I see continually who disregard poverty! How many who desire death, or who meet it without terror or regret! That man who is digging in my garden, buried his father or his son only this morning. The very names which they give to their diseases serve to lighten and alleviate them: in their language, consumption is only a cough, dysentery nothing more than a looseness, a pleurisy only a cold. And as they give them gentle names, so they endure them cheerfully; sickness must be grievous indeed before it interrupts their bodily labour, and they never keep their beds but to die. 'That simple unsophisticated virtue of theirs [he quotes his favourite Seneca] becomes a deep and subtle philosophy.'"—(III. 12.)

He proceeds in the same chapter to speak of the fortitude displayed by his poor neighbours during the visitation of pestilence, which, as we have seen, had driven himself and his family from home.

"What an example of fortitude did we not see in the simple character of all this people! Every one of them calmly preparing for and awaiting death, the next night or the next day, with a countenance and speech as free from fear as though they had made a covenant with death in this strait, and it had been an universal and inevitable sentence! . . . I did not notice that they commonly showed any other anxiety than for a decent burial. Some, while yet in health, dug their own graves; others lay down in them while yet alive; and a labourer of my own, when expiring, drew the earth over him with his hands and feet.

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. . . We have deserted nature, and would fain teach her how to act—her, who did so happily and safely guide us; yet meanwhile, out of the traces of her teaching, and what little of her likeness still remains imprinted, by grace of ignorance, in the life of this rustic crowd of uncultured men, learning is fain to borrow every day a pattern for her disciples of fortitude, of patience, and of innocence. It is grand to see how those who are so full of showy knowledge have yet to imitate this foolishness of simplicity, and that in the highest acts of moral virtue."—(III. 12.)

He speaks to the same effect elsewhere, in the "Apology for Sebond." After quoting from Cicero on the pleasures and advantages of learning—"'Tis this that has taught us religion, moderation, magnanimity: which has dispelled the mist from our eyes, that we may see all things—high and low, first, last, and intermediate: it is this which furnishes us with the means of living well and happily, and guides us to pass through life without disgust and without offence"—he adds at once, with a protest which is surely not all affectation,—"Does not this man seem to be speaking of the condition of the almighty and ever-living God? While as to the results, a thousand poor village-women have led a life more equable, more sweet, more patient than his was."

And again:—

"I have known in my time a hundred artisans, a hundred labourers, wiser and happier than the rectors of the universities, and whom I would much rather have resembled."

The same kindly nature of the man shows itself in the tone in which he always speaks of animals. It is not only that he has "a mortal hatred of cruelty, both by nature and on principle;" that he "cannot see a chicken's

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neck wrung without pain, or bear to hear the cry of a hare in the hound's jaws, in spite of the excitement of the chase," and "hardly ever takes a beast or bird alive that he does not presently turn loose,"—but he has a kindly interest in his dumb fellow-creatures very exceptional, as he knows and feels, among the men of his generation.

"Nature has, I fear, implanted in man a sort of instinct of inhumanity. No one takes any pleasure in seeing beasts play with and caress each other, and no one fails to find it in seeing them tear and mangle each other. And, lest any should laugh at the sympathy I have with them—religion itself requires us to show some favour on their behalf: and when we consider that one and the same Master has lodged us in this palace for his service, and that they belong to his family as well as we, it has good reason for enjoining upon us a certain respect and affection towards them.

. . . . . .

"As to the family relationship between us and the brutes, I do not hold much with that idea: nor with what several nations have done, and notably the most ancient and noble, in not only receiving beasts into their society and companionship, but even assigning them a rank very much above themselves; in some cases, regarding them as the familiars and favourites of the gods, and holding them in more than human reverence and respect: in others, recognising no God and no Divinity save them.

. . . . . .

"But when, among the more moderate opinions, I meet with arguments tending to show the close resemblance between ourselves and the brutes, and how far they share our highest privileges, and with what great appearance of truth we may be compared together, I abate a good deal of our presumption, and willingly abdicate that imaginary sovereignty over the rest of creation which is attributed to us.

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"Even setting all this aside, there is still a certain respect, and a general duty of humanity, which we owe not only to beasts, which have life and feeling, but even to trees and plants. To men we owe justice; to other created things such favour and kindliness as they may be capable of receiving: there is a certain intercourse between them and ourselves, and a certain mutual bond of obligation. I am not afraid of discovering the tenderness of my nature, so childish, it may be, that I cannot well refuse my dog a game of play when he begs for it, however inconvenient it may be." —(II. 11.)

He gladly sees in Pythagoras's doctrine of the transmigration of souls a mystical claim for sympathy with the lower animals: he recognises in the worship paid to certain of the species a recognition of their virtues and their services to man; he admires the Turks for having founded hospitals for sick and crippled beasts, and Cimon for giving honourable burial to the mares which had thrice won for him the prize at Olympia, and Plutarch for his unwillingness to send to the shambles the ox that had been long at work in his service.

But it is in the "Apology" just mentioned that he has allowed the freest play to his fancy, as to the relative position of man and the lower animals.

"How does man know by any effort of his intelligence the internal motions and secrets of animals? By what comparison of them with ourselves does he prove the stupidity which he attributes to them? When I play with my cat, who knows but that she is as much amused with me as I am with her? We make sport for each other by our mutual absurdities: if I have my hour to begin play or to decline it, she has hers too. The defect which hinders communication between animals and us, why may it not be as much on our side as on theirs? 'Tis yet to be determined on

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which side lies the fault that we do not understand each other—for we do not understand them any more than they do us. For the same reason, they may possibly think us beasts, as we think them. 'Tis no great marvel if we do not understand them; for we are in the same case as to the Basques or the Troglodytes. There have been always some men who boasted that they could understand animals, as Apollonius of Tyana, Melampus, Thales, and others. And since it is the fact, as cosmographers tell us, that there are some nations who acknowledge a dog for their king, it must needs be that they assign some interpretation to his voice and movements. Observe the parity between us; we have some imperfect apprehension of their meaning, and so have they of ours, in about the same degree. They fawn upon us, threaten us, and beg of us—and we do the same to them. Besides, we discover plainly enough that between themselves they have a full and complete intelligence, and understand one another—not only those of the same species, but even of different ones. From one particular bark of a dog a horse understands that he is angry; at another tone of his he is not frightened at all. Even in the case of animals who utter no sounds, we readily conclude from the interchange of services between them that they have some other means of communication: their movements show it clearly. And why not? Just as our own deaf-mutes dispute, argue, and tell stories, by signs; I have seen some of them so apt and accomplished at it, that they positively lacked nothing to make themselves perfectly understood."

He goes on to instance, somewhat too much at length for these pages, the language of lovers' eyes; the intelligence so readily conveyed by the movements of the head and hands, by the shrug of a shoulder or the raising of an eyebrow—"a common language, that all men understand;" not to speak of alphabets on the fingers, and the symbols of mathematics. He sees in the bees, as many have seen, all the functions of a well-ordered

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commonwealth; in the swallow and the spider, the perfection of mechanical art.

"We see plainly enough, in most of their works, how much animals have the superiority over us, and how feeble our skill is to imitate them; nevertheless we recognise in our own clumsier performances the faculties we employ, and how our mind puts forth her whole resources: why do we not think the same of them? Why do we attribute to some natural and slavish instinct works which surpass all that we can do by nature and art combined? whereby, without thinking of it, we give them a very great advantage over us, in that we make nature accompany them and lead them by the hand with the tenderness of a mother, to all the acts and convenient arrangements of their life, while as to us, she abandons us to chance and fortune, and leaves us to seek out from art all that is needful for self-preservation; nay, refusing us from time to time the means and power of procuring, by any instruction or effort of our mind, that subsistence which comes naturally to the brutes; so that their brutish stupidity, as we call it, surpasses, as to all the conveniencies of life, our divine intelligence."

Montaigne will not admit, however, the common complaint, even though it has the authority of Lucretius[1] (whom in this case he quotes only to refute), that man has been more hardly treated by nature than other animals, in that we are far more helpless in infancy, and stand in need of artificial coverings to supply the place of the hair and fur with which she has liberally clothed most of her other children. He insists upon it—though here again we see the smile as he writes—that our skin is quite sufficient clothing for us, if we would but accustom ourselves to think so; and that the ladies of the French Court were living examples of

[1] Lucretius, v. 123.

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the needlessness of clothes for even the most delicate constitutions; and that the human little one (if he would but be content with acorns and suchlike) might soon contrive to pick up a living for himself as well as a young rabbit, and defend himself with his natural weapons of teeth and nails.

Again, if man surpasses the rest of the animated world in the powers of reason and imagination, this the essayist professes to think a very doubtful good.

"If it be so—if he alone amongst all animate beings has this faculty of imagination and this want of rule in his thoughts, which represent to him what is and what is not, and what he wishes for, the false as well as the true—it is an advantage which he has bought very dear, and of which he has very little cause to boast. For from this source have sprung most of the ills which trouble him,—sin, sickness, irresolution, embarrassment, and despair. I say then, to return to my proposition, that there is no apparent reason for believing that beasts do, by a mere natural and necessary instinct, the same things that we do by choice and exertion: from like effects we are bound to infer like faculties, and from the higher effects the higher faculties; and to confess by consequence that the same mode of reasoning, the same method which we employ to produce our results, is employed by the beasts also,—or else some other that is better."

He is half inclined to entertain the idea of an old cynical philosopher, that most of the arts which mankind possesses are only what we have learnt from what we call the lower animals — weaving from the spider, architecture from the swallow, music from the nightingale and the swan, the use of medicine from the practice of many other creatures. That brutes have no religion is, he contends, a mere assumption on

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our parts; that they have a strong faculty of imagination we can perceive from their habit of dreaming; while as to the virtues of magnanimity, of sorrow for faults, of gratitude, and fidelity of friendship even unto death, they confessedly in many cases have shown themselves greatly our superiors. As to temperance and moderation in the natural appetites, he has but to refer to the dictum of the old physicians—"Keep the head and the feet warm, and for the rest, live like a beast." Health, for which the wise confess they would willingly barter all their wisdom, is to the brutes a natural inheritance. They have their mutual associations and alliances for help and protection; as the whale with the guide-fish, and the crocodile with the Egyptian wren, which wakes him when threatened by his enemy the ichneumon; and if they have no wars, they are in this respect far wiser and happier than man.

Most people who have any acquaintance with animal pets, and their respective masters and mistresses, will readily sympathise with Montaigne on that point.

"When Diogenes saw his relations anxious to ransom him from slavery—'They are fools,' said he: 'the man who keeps me and maintains me is *my* slave;' and so those who keep domestic animals ought rather to be called their servants than their masters."[1]

But he goes further still. If man imagines himself the most perfect of created beings, so possibly may other animals too. Man thinks the world was made for him.

[1] Beaumarchais had surely read Montaigne, when he composed the inscription for his dog's collar:—

"Je suis Mlle. Follette—Beaumarchais m'appartient."

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"But why may not a goose argue thus? 'All the parts of the universe have reference to me: the use of the earth is for me to walk upon, the sun is to light me, the stars breathe their influence on me; I derive this advantage from the winds, and this from the waters; there is nothing which this whole firmament regards with such favour as myself: I am the darling of nature. Is it not man that keeps me, lodges me, serves me? 'Tis for me he sows and grinds; if he eats me, so does he also eat his fellow-men; and so do I also the worms which kill and eat him.'"

Are we so sure, he says again in this chapter, that our own senses are so perfect and complete as to form the rule and pattern of animate existence? "I doubt if man be furnished with all natural senses: I see animals who live an entire and perfect life, some without sight, others without hearing: who knows whether to us also, one, two, three, or more other senses may not be wanting?" Our own unconsciousness of the deficiency is no safe argument: the man who is born blind neither feels his defect nor regrets it—his only knowledge of it is derived from what others tell him. That we have no innate sense of truth or right—no infallible reason to guide us—he holds as certain; yet this sense seems needed to make the human life complete. There are some particulars in which animals appear to possess a sense which we do not; and we know also that our own senses not unfrequently deceive us.

"Who knows but that, through such default, the great part of the real appearance of things is hid from us? Who knows but that the difficulties we find in many of nature's works proceed from this? and whether many of the results of animal intelligence, which are beyond our own capacity, are not produced by the operation of some sense which we lack? and whether some among them have not,

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by this means, a life more full and complete than ours? We apprehend an apple, as it seems to us, with all our senses: we find in it redness, smoothness, scent, and flavour; but it may have other properties besides these, desiccatory or astringent, of which we possess no sense that can take cognisance. The properties possessed by many things which we call 'occult,'—as, for instance, the power of the loadstone to attract iron,—is it not probable that there are sensitive faculties in nature qualified to judge and take cognisance of these, and that the want of such faculties leaves us in ignorance of the true essence of such things?"

However much of paradox Montaigne may have consciously maintained in these speculations, which occupy a good many pages of this "Apology," it can hardly be denied that there is much plausibility in his argument, and that it is handled with more than his usual happy ingenuity. He had found a good deal of the material in his favourite Sextus Empiricus, but the lively presentment of it is all his own.

It is in another essay[1] that he quotes with satisfaction an assertion of Plutarch's, that "he did not find such a great difference between beast and beast as he did between man and man." Montaigne declares that, for his own part, he goes much beyond Plutarch: he holds "that there is much wider interval, in point of mental qualities, in some cases, between man and man, than there is between some men and some beasts."

The most cursory perusal of these Essays will convince us that in many things the writer was before his age. We have seen his general tolerance of religious and political opinions, his hatred of cruelty in all shapes, his

[1] I. 42 *ad init.*

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sympathies with the poor. We might trace, perhaps, in his pages the first rise, or at least the first unreserved expression, of ideas utterly foreign to the spirit of the sixteenth century, which have since won their way into modern legislation and practice. He saw clearly what seems to us now the most obvious truism, that judicial torture was "a trial of patience rather than of truth; for why should pain make a man confess a fact, rather than make him assert what is not the fact?" The practical result in many cases was that "the man whom the judge remits to the torture in order that he may not be made to die innocent, is made to die both innocent and tortured."[1] The cogent arguments he uses against the horrible cruelties perpetrated under cover of the law, sound to us in these days as commonplace; but they were political and religious heresies when he dared to print them. It was not until more than two hundred years afterwards that the judicial question was finally abolished in France: it lingered in England until near the middle of the seventeenth century, and was in use long after in the dungeons of the Holy Inquisition. He is bold enough to follow Plato, and to insist that all punishment is for correction, not for revenge; that we do not correct the man we hang, but correct others through him. The principle is sufficiently familiar to modern legislators: but it had been too much forgotten in the long interval between Plato and Montaigne. Nay, he would even go further than our modern legislation has yet ventured, though many steps have been taken in that direction; for he seems to have held that capital punishment was altogether a mistake,—that the worst use you could

[1] II. 5, "On Conscience."

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put a man to was to hang him. He had remarked, long before the existence of Vagrant Acts and Mendicity Societies, that begging was a profession—a profession that had its charms as well as its profits—not a misfortune; and that the professional mendicant was, as we have found him, quite irreclaimable.[1] He has lost the little belief he once had in sorcery and witchcraft.

"How much more natural and probable I find it that two men should lie, than that one man should fly in twelve hours, as the wind does, from east to west! How much more natural that our understanding should be carried out of its place by the flightiness of a disordered reason, than that one of us, in flesh and blood, should be carried by a strange spirit on a broomstick up the chimney!"—(III. 11.)

He "would rather prescribe hellebore than hemlock" in cases of reputed witchcraft; and in all such cases "it is surely setting an extraordinary value on one's own conjectures to have a poor creature roasted alive for them." Yet it was near a hundred years afterwards that such a judge as Hale declared his belief in the guilt of two poor wretches, against whom Sir Thomas Browne was a witness; and it was so late as 1712 that the last "witches" were judicially murdered in England.

Our modern divorce-courts, whose effect upon public morals is yet a disputed question, would have commended themselves to Montaigne's deliberate judgment. He did not believe in the principle that the recognised indissolubility of marriage will lead both parties to make the best of it.

"We have thought to tie the marriage-knot more firmly

[1] III. 13.

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by taking away all means of dissolving it; but the tie of the will and the affections is relaxed and loosened, the tighter that of obligation is drawn. On the other hand, what kept marriage honourable and sacred at Rome so long was the liberty given to those who would to dissolve it. They took the more care of their wives, the more risk there was of losing them; and with that full liberty of divorce, they passed above five hundred years before any availed themselves of it."

Valerius Maximus is his authority for this rather questionable statement. But the purity of domestic life in the early ages of Rome is frequently the regretful theme of her poets: our modern civilisation has reproduced the morals of the Empire, not of the Republic.

Some of the reforms which suggested themselves to his busy mind have not yet found favour with legislators. But many readers will see a good deal of force in his idea that the State should exercise more control over the power of the individual to dispose of his property by will, and that the best will is, after all, that which leaves the ordinary law of succession to take its course.

"The law has considered the matter better than we can; and it were better to let the law miscarry in its election, than to risk the miscarrying by a rash election of our own. Nor are these things really our own, inasmuch as by civil prescription, and apart from our interference, they are already assigned to certain successors. And though we have some liberty beyond that, yet I hold that it needs urgent and manifest cause to take away from any man that to which circumstances have given him a right, and public equity has given a title; and that it is an unreasonable abuse of our freedom of action to make it serve our private and capricious fancies."—(II. 8.)

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He has no patience with those churlish testators who

"Die, and endow a college or a cat;"

and speaks with well-deserved abhorrence of the capricious selfishness of wealthy relatives, "who play with their wills as they would with apples or rods, to reward or chastise every turn of conduct in those who profess an interest in them. A will is a thing of too lasting consequence and too serious importance to be thus brought out for review at every turn."

He has an opinion, too, which bears upon the competitive examinations which have been the hobby of modern reformers,—an opinion to which the more rational section of the public are gradually coming round:—

"Some of our parliaments, when they are about to admit officers, examine them in knowledge only; others add to this a trial of their sense, by referring to them the judgment of some legal case. The latter seem to me to adopt by far the better method; and though both these qualifications are necessary, and it is requisite that both should be found in the candidates, yet most certainly that of knowledge is less indispensable than that of judgment: the last may possibly make shift without the first, but the first without the last, never."—(I. 24.)

In his essay "On Sumptuary Laws" he points out, with his usual good sense, the futility of all such restrictions. He saw that they rather tended to encourage the taste for what they were meant to prohibit.

"To enact that none but princes shall eat turbot, or be allowed to wear velvet or gold lace, and to interdict the people from these things, what else is it but to bring them into fashion, and make everybody long all the more to adopt them? Let kings be bold enough to lay aside these marks

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of grandeur; they have plenty of others besides. Such excesses are more excusable in any other than in a prince. . . . Let them but set the fashion of leaving off such luxuries, and the thing will be done in a month, without edict or ordinance: we shall all follow. The law ought rather to order, on the contrary, that scarlet and gold-work be forbidden to all classes and professions save mountebanks and prostitutes. It was by such a plan that Zeleucus reformed the luxurious fashions of the Locrians. His ordinances were —'That no woman of free birth should have more than one waiting-woman to attend her,—unless she was drunk; nor go out of the city at night, or wear jewels or gold on her person, or an embroidered robe,—unless she had lost her reputation.'"[1]

The antipathy which he had conceived (or at least chose to profess) against law and lawyers, in spite of his own connection with the profession, has been already noticed in the sketch of his life, and breaks out from time to time in the Essays. It has been sometimes ascribed to a kind of affectation in the man: as he rails against pedantry and the display of learning, in order to prove that he is not a scholar but a gentleman, all the while that he is quoting from one Latin or Greek author after another in a fashion which his enemies might well have called pedantic, so, they would say, he attacks the law because he would have us understand that his profession is rather the sword than the gown, which he has only worn by accident. It is possible that there may be something of this. But he had even a greater

[1] It would have amused Montaigne to know that yellow-starched ruffs went out of fashion after the notorious Mrs Turner was hanged in one; and that at a much more recent date black satin gowns were partially eschewed because Mrs Manning chose to wear that dress at her execution.

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natural antipathy to another of the learned professions—that of medicine. He has given vent to this feeling in a chapter bearing the not very appropriate title, "On the Resemblance of Children to their Fathers." He there introduces one of his many good stories,—the history of a village called Lahontan, of which he was patron, which had long been a kind of "Happy Valley," independent of the surrounding world, and free from its vices and troubles, until in an evil hour one ambitious native brought up a son as a notary, and another married his daughter to a physician. From that time all their peace and happiness was gone. The lawyer set them all at logger-heads; the physician taught them the names of diseases, and the use of drugs.

"They swear it was only from that time forth they began to feel that the night-air made their heads bad, that to drink when they were hot made them ill, that the autumn winds were more dangerous than the spring; that since the invention of this art of medicine, they found themselves overwhelmed with a legion of maladies they had never known before, they felt a general failure of their ancient vigour, and their lives were cut shorter by half."

So much from his own knowledge, Then, in old times, did not the Romans flourish six hundred years before they even heard of medicine? And did they not banish it from the city, after they had tried it?

"No Roman, until the days of Pliny, condescended to practise physic: it was practised by foreigners and Greeks, as it is now among us French by Latiners: for, as a great physician says, we do not readily adopt the medicine we can understand, any more than we do the drugs we gather ourselves."

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He thought his hatred of physicians and their drugs must be hereditary: neither his father, grandfather, nor great-grandfather had ever consulted a physician, and he himself had a thorough contempt for them.

"The science of medicine is founded on examples and experience: so is my opinion. Have we not here a special and very favourable experience? I doubt whether they can find me, in their register-books, three cases of three individuals born, brought up, and dying under the same roof, who have lived so long under their treatment. They must needs admit that in these instances, if reason be not on my side, at least luck is: and luck, with the faculty, goes a great deal further than reason. I beg they will not take me at a disadvantage just now,—that they will not use threats to me, in the low condition I am in: that would not be fair play. Surely I have got advantage enough over them by these examples in my own family, so that they need go no further. Nothing in human nature is so permanent as all that. The trial has succeeded with us for nearly two hundred years, and it is but reasonable that the experiment should begin to fail now. Surely they must not reproach me with the maladies which have got me by the throat now; is it not enough that I have lived in good health, to my own share, forty-seven years?"—(II. 37.)

This hereditary antipathy, however, he would have done his best to overcome; nor would he have objected to their remedies merely because they were disagreeable; but he observed that no people were so continually ill, and so long in getting well, as those who were continually taking medicine. Drastic medicines he specially protests against.

"Let nature alone a little: the Providence that takes care of the fleas and moles will take care of men too, if they will

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only have the same patience as the fleas and moles, and let it have its way. Much use it is for us to cry, 'Get on!' 'Tis a good way to make ourselves hoarse, but hardly to make much progress. . . . Order a purge for your brain —it will be much better employed there than upon your stomach."—(II. 36.)

On this particular point modern science appears to have gradually come round to his opinion.

"For my own part, my opinion of medicine is the worst or the best, as you please; for we have, thank heaven, no dealings together. My case is the reverse of other people's; for I have a contemptuous indifference to medicine at ordinary times, but when I am taken ill, instead of coming to terms with it, I begin more thoroughly to hate and fear it; and I reply to those who press me to take physic, that they must wait at any rate until I am restored to my usual health and strength, that I may be better able to stand the potency and danger of their compounds. I let nature do her work, presuming her to be furnished with teeth and claws to defend herself against any attack made upon her, and to keep together the frame whose dissolution she abhors. I am afraid lest, instead of coming to her aid, when she is engaged in this close and desperate struggle with disease, we may be helping her adversary instead of her, and giving her fresh work to do."—(I. 23.)

It must be remembered in the author's defence what a system of combined ignorance, assumption, and charlatanism formed the theory and practice of medicine in his times. The pseudo-sciences of alchemy and astrology were mixed up, in the professional repertory of the physician, with the most ignorant empiricism. They were quite right, he thought, to make a mystery of their craft. He only complains that they did not carry this out as thoroughly as they might.

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"If I had been of their council, I would have made my system more sacred and mysterious. They had begun very well: but they have not carried it out in the same way. It was an excellent beginning to make gods and dæmons the inventors of their science, to have adopted a special language, and a special fashion of writing; though, indeed, philosophy holds, on that point, that it is folly to advise a man, even for his good, in an unintelligible fashion. . . .

"It was a good rule in their art, a rule which accompanies all fantastic, vain, and supernatural arts, that faith on the part of the patient should anticipate, in good hope and assurance, the effects and operation of the prescription; a rule which they press even so far as to hold that the worst and most ignorant physician was better for a man who had confidence in him, than the most experienced of whom he knew nothing. . . . But they made a mistake, I say again, that after this excellent beginning they did not add this, to make their meetings and consultations more mysterious and secret. No profane person ought to be admitted to them, any more than to the secret ceremonies of Æsculapius; for it falls out, owing to this oversight, that their irresolution—the weakness of their arguments, of their diagnosis, and of their principles—the bitterness of their disputes, full of hatred, jealousy, and selfish considerations—coming to be discovered by everybody, a man must be very blind indeed not to see that he runs great risk at their hands. Who ever saw one physician make use of another's prescription without making some subtraction or addition? Thus they let us into the secret of their art, and let us see that they consider their own reputation, and consequently their profit, more than the interest of their patient."

The very nature of their prescriptions breathes the rankest charlatanism; he gives a string of them, which reads like the ingredients of the witches' caldron—

"Eye of newt, and toe of frog."

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They "wear the appearance of magical charms rather than of solid science." The old physicians, he says, were utterly at variance with each other; and down to his own times, this so-called science was always changing its theory. Paracelsus, Fioravanti, Argenterius,[1]—each in turn altered, as he understands, the whole system of medicine, and accused all who went before them of ignorance and presumption. "Between them all, I leave you to judge how the poor patient fares." Then, look at the various drugs—one to warm the stomach, another to cool the liver, another to act upon the kidneys—and all prescribed in combination!

"When all these things are mixed in one draught, is it not a delusion to hope that their virtues should proceed to separate and arrange themselves out of this confused mixture, to take such different routes? I should be infinitely afraid lest they should lose or change their tickets, and intrude into each other's quarters. Besides, the making up of this prescription depends on another agent, to whose honesty and mercy we once again abandon our lives."

The doctors killed, he thinks, "a friend of his" (he means La Boëtie), "who was worth the whole pack of them put together." He is resolved, so far as he knows himself, to have nothing to do with them; still, there is no knowing what may happen.

"It was Pericles, I think, who, when some one asked him how he did, replied, 'You can judge by this,'—showing the amulets which he was wearing on his neck and arms. He meant to imply that he must be very sick indeed, to be re-

[1] Leonard Fioravanti of Bologna, an alchemist and charlatan rather than physician, at that time in great repute: Jean Argentier, also an Italian, best known by his attacks on Galen.

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duced to have recourse to such ridiculous things, and allow himself to be equipped in that fashion. I cannot say but that I may be some day drawn over to such a ridiculous notion as to put my life and my health at the mercy and caprice of physicians. It is possible I may fall into such dotage: I cannot answer for my firmness in the future; but I am also quite sure that then, if any one asks me how I am, I can answer with Pericles, 'You may judge by this,'—showing my hand with six grains of opiate in it. It will be an unmistakable symptom that I am very ill indeed: I shall have my judgment terribly out of order. If fear and impatience ever get that advantage over me, it may be at once concluded that I have a dangerous fever in my mind."—(II. 37.)

Old age is regarded from no very favourable point of view. He has none of the smooth things to say of it which are so popular, so commonplace, and so generally untrue. He does not believe that we grow wiser or better as we grow old. He does not look forward to it with any pleasure, nor, what is rarer, will he pretend to do so.

"It seems to me that in old age our souls are subject to maladies and imperfections which are more troublesome than in our youth. I used to say so when I was young, and then they taunted me with not having a beard to my chin yet. I say so still now I am old, when my grey hairs may win me some credit for the assertion. We apply the term wisdom to the dulness of our spirits, and our distaste for the things of the present. But in truth we do not so much forsake our vices as change them, and, to my thinking, for others that are worse. Besides a weak and foolish pride, an irrelevant prating, a froward and unsociable humour and superstition, and a ridiculous love of money when we have lost all use for it, I find there more envy, more injustice, and more

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malignity: it gives us even more wrinkles in the spirit than in the face ;[1] and souls are never or very rarely found, which in growing old do not grow sour and musty. Man moves by regular progression alike to his perfection and to his decay. . . .

"What strange metamorphoses do I not see it make every day in many of my own acquaintances! It is a powerful distemper, and one which steals on by natural and imperceptible steps; it needs great and provident study, and great precaution, to avoid the imperfections it loads us with, or at least to check their progress. I feel that, spite of all my defences, it gains upon me foot by foot; I hold my ground against it as well as I can, but I do not know myself to what it may drive me at last."—(III. 2.)

"I have grown a great many years older since my first publication, but I doubt whether I have grown an inch the wiser. I at this moment, and I as I was then, are certainly two very different persons; but which is the better, I am not in the least able to say. It were a fine thing to grow old, if we were always moving in the direction of improvement: but 'tis a drunken, tottering, unsteady, awkward motion, like the reeds which the wind bends to and fro at its will."—(III. 9.)

He has therefore no notion of meeting old age half-way. He will keep young as long as he can: like Cicero, he had rather be an old man for a shorter time, than grow old before he is so.

"Since it is the privilege of the mind to rescue itself from old age, I persuade mine to do so as far as it can: let it keep green and flourish the while, if it can, like the mistletoe

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[1] "Et les rides du front passent jusqu'à l'esprit."—Corneille, *Epître au Roi.*

Southey quotes, as either from George Wither or Daniel—

> "Old age doth give, by too much space,
> More wrinkles in the spirit than the face."

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on a dead tree. But I fear me 'tis a traitor: it has leagued itself so closely with the body, that it deserts me at every turn to follow that in its necessity. In vain do I coax it and try to deal with it apart: it is no use for me to seek to detach it from this alliance, to present to its notice Seneca and Catullus, or fair ladies and royal dances: if its companion has the colic, it seems to have it too; the very faculties which are peculiarly and properly its own cannot help it then: they evidently feel the chill; there is no liveliness in the workings of the mind, unless there be somewhat of it in the body too."—(III. 5.)

The author's ideas of comparative youth and age are somewhat different from those entertained by most moderns. He speaks of himself at forty as having entered the avenue of old age,—when "what he shall be from that time forth will be but a half-existence, and no longer his whole self:" though he thinks that men should perhaps "not be dismissed to the fireside till they are fifty-five or sixty." What would he have thought of our modern statesmen who show no signs of senility at threescore years and ten? On the other hand, he believes the mental powers "are as adult at twenty as ever they are likely to be, and that they then show all that they can do"—a fact which is surely contrary to experience. More grand deeds, he finds, are done before thirty than after that age; and he instances Hannibal and Scipio, and here he is perhaps nearer to the truth.

"As to myself, I hold it for certain that since that age both my mind and body have dwindled rather than grown, and gone back rather than advanced. It is possible that in the case of those who employ life well, knowledge and experience may increase with years; but vivacity, readiness,

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firmness, and many other qualities more really our own, more important and essential, languish and decay. Sometimes it is the body which first succumbs to age, sometimes it is the mind. I have seen men often enough whose brains have suffered from weakness long before their legs or their stomach; and inasmuch as this is a complaint very little felt by the patient, and of which the symptoms are obscure, it is so much the more dangerous."—(I. 57 *ad fin.*)

It is not easy within a limited space to select from the rich variety of Montaigne's pages, where so many subjects are rather touched than discussed, and so many original thoughts clothed in the striking language of which he was the ready master. This is from the essay "On the Inequality between Men:"—

"It is marvellous that, with the exception of ourselves, no creature is valued except for its own genuine qualities. We praise a horse because he is strong and active, not for his caparisons; a greyhound for its swiftness, not for its collar; a hawk for her power of flight, not for her jesses and bells. Why do we not in the same way value a man for what is really his own? You never buy a pig in a poke: if you are bargaining for a horse, you have him stripped of his housings: why, in your estimate of a man, do you judge of him wrapped and muffled in his clothes? He discovers to us nothing but parts which are not his at all, and conceals those by which alone we could really estimate his value. It is the price of the sword you inquire about, not of the scabbard. You possibly would not offer a farthing for him if you saw him stripped; you must judge of him by himself, not by what he has about him. As an old writer [Seneca] pleasantly says—'Do you know why you think him tall? You reckon in the height of his clogs.' The pedestal is no part of the statue. Measure the man without his stilts: let him put off his riches and honours; let him

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show himself in his shirt. Has he a body fit for its functions, sound and active? What kind of soul has he? Is she fair, vigorous, happily provided with all her faculties? Is she rich in what is her own, or in what she has borrowed?"—(I. 42.)

The truly wise man, he says, after quoting Horace, is raised "five hundred fathom above kingdoms and duchies"—

"Whereas, if we look at a peasant and a king, a noble and a villein, a magistrate and a private man, there appears at once to our eyes an immense disparity, though they only differ, as one may say, in their breeches and stockings."

The emperors and kings who so dazzle us are, after all, but actors on a stage.

"Look behind the curtain: 'tis but an ordinary man, possibly less worth than the lowest of his subjects. The happiness of the one lies within—the other's is only in his breeches."[1]

He has an essay "On Anger" which contains the germ of much which has been since written on the subject. How true are his remarks on the rash and irresponsible anger of parents:—

"No one would hesitate to punish a judge with death, who should have condemned a prisoner in a fit of passion: why is it allowed any more to parents and masters to beat and strike children in their anger? That is not correction,—it is revenge. Chastisement stands to children in the place of medicine; and should we endure a physician who was angry and violent against his patient? . .

[1] He quotes Seneca's happy turn of words, "*Istius bracteata felicitas est.*" Sen. Epist., 115.

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"We ourselves, if we would act rightly, should never lay our hand on our servants while our passion lasts. So long as our pulse beats fast, and we feel ourselves disturbed, let us put the matter by; things will wear quite another face to us when we are calm and cool. At the moment, it is passion that speaks, not we: seen through its medium, faults are magnified to us, like objects seen through a mist. Besides, chastisements administered with calmness and discretion are much better received, and do more benefit to those who suffer them: in the other case, they do not think themselves punished justly by a man heated with anger and passion; and allege in their justification the master's excessive passion, his inflamed countenance, his unwonted oaths, and his own excitement and headstrong fury. . . .

"Rash and indiscriminate scolding grows into a habit, and makes every one despise it. The language you use to a servant for a theft loses its effect, because it is the same that he has known you use a hundred times against him for having rinsed a glass badly, or set a stool out of its place."

There is a more amusing truth in the following:—

"Those who have to deal with testy women may have found out what a rage it puts them into when one opposes silence and coolness to their fury, and disdains to notice their scolding. The orator Cœlius was very passionate by nature. A friend was once supping with him, a man of gentle and quiet manners, who, to avoid provoking him, took the line of approving and agreeing to all he said. The other could not endure that his temper should be deprived of its regular aliment in that way. 'For Heaven's sake,' said he, 'contradict me in something, that there may be two of us!"

The conclusion of the chapter is good:—

"Aristotle tells us that anger serves as a weapon for virtue and valour. That is very likely: nevertheless, they who contradict him answer happily enough, that 'tis a weapon of a novel use: we move all other arms, this moves us: it is

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not our hand which guides this, but this which guides our hand: it holds us, instead of our holding it."

Good advice is, he considers, much more readily given than taken. He is always very ready to give it himself; but as to whether his friends take it or not he is very indifferent: and he confesses he very rarely followed such advice as his friends gave him, unless on some point where he really stood in need of information as to matters of fact or science. They sometimes preached to him patience and contentment:—

"I see the reasonableness of such advice, and see it clearly enough; but they would have spared their breath, and spoken more to the purpose, if they had said to me in one word, 'Be wise.' Such a resolution goes beyond wisdom: it is its effect and result. It is just what physicians do, who go on preaching to a poor wretched patient, 'Be cheerful:' they would be giving him advice one degree less foolish, if they were to say to him, 'Be well.' For my part, I am but an ordinary person; 'Be content with your present condition' is very wholesome counsel, clear and easily understood —that is to say, so far as the theory of it goes; but to practise it is no more in the power of your wise men than of myself."[1]

Montaigne is, in many points, a conservative both politically and socially.

"To my thinking, in public affairs there is no system so bad, provided it be of long standing and firmly established, that is not better than change and alteration. Our manners are very corrupt, and have a marvellous tendency to grow worse; amongst our laws and usages there are many which are barbarous and monstrous; nevertheless, by reason of the

[1] One can give advice, but one cannot give the wisdom to profit by it."—La Rochefoucault.

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difficulty of putting ourselves into a better condition, and the risk of meddling with things, if I could put anything under the wheel to stop it where it is, I would do it with all my heart. The worst evil I find in our own state is its instability; and that our laws, no more than our clothes, can take any settled shape. It is very easy to accuse a government of imperfection, for all things human are full of it; it is very easy to beget in any people a contempt for ancient ordinances: no man ever yet attempted it but he succeeded.[1] But to set up a better constitution in place of that which has been destroyed,—very many have foundered who have undertaken it."—(II. 17.)

"The best and most excellent government is that under which a nation has maintained itself. . . . Nothing presses so hard on a state as innovation: change alone gives shape to injustice and tyranny. When a portion of the fabric is out of order, it should be propped: we may prevent the decay and corruption natural to all things from carrying us too far from our foundations and principles; but to undertake the reconstruction of such a vast fabric, and to change the foundations of such a great building, is for those only to take in hand who efface in order to cleanse, who would reform particular defects by a universal confusion, and cure diseases by death. The world is by no means apt at mending itself: it is so impatient of any pressure, that it thinks only of cutting itself clear, no matter at what price. We see by a thousand examples that it generally cures itself to its cost." —(III. 9.)

It was this conservative spirit which made him regard the Protestant reformers with no very favourable eye. Their principles were subversive of the established order of things: and that order, whether in Church or State,

[1] "He that goeth about to teach men that they are not so well governed as they ought to be, shall never lack ready and attentive hearers."—Hooker.

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he was stout in upholding. The same feeling shows itself in an amusing way, as to a minor ecclesiastical reform—that of the calendar. France had just made a sudden step (in 1582) by order of Pope Gregory XIII., from the 9th to the 20th of December; on which Montaigne writes—"This late cutting out of ten days by the Pope has brought me so low that I cannot well get used to it: I belong to the years in which we kept another reckoning."

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CHAPTER VI.

CHARACTER.

Any attempt to draw the character of Montaigne is necessarily made under this manifest disadvantage to its impartiality,—that almost the only evidence is his own. Of the view of it taken by his contemporaries we have hardly any evidence at all. There is material enough for such a sketch—but it is furnished by himself. His self-revelations, however, have this much in favour of their sincerity, that he appears to show us both sides of the picture: if he lets us know the nobler qualities of his mind and his disposition, he at least makes no secret of their meaner and baser features. Rousseau, of all critics, has accused him of a "false *naïveté*" on such points; and, as has been already said, he betrays a morbid love of self-dissection for the benefit of the public which can be neither admired nor defended, and the results are what we sometimes hesitate to accept with perfect trust. He admits that self-description is always difficult, though in the matter of his own character "no one can be so learned as himself." There is no reason to think, on the whole, that the portrait which he has taken of himself from all points of view is less trustworthy than most

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modern biographies, written by admiring friends, which are accepted as faithful moral photographs,—with the features artistically "touched."

That Montaigne was kind-hearted, of an amiable if somewhat hasty temper, an average husband and father, as such relationships were regarded in his days, a good neighbour and a pleasant companion, may safely be gathered from the contents of the foregoing pages. Nor does it need his own assertion to assure us that he had "that wherein never man yet thought himself defective"—good sense: it breathes in every line of his writings.

He was essentially a gentleman, in most of the best senses of that word—a French gentleman of the sixteenth century, no doubt, with many of the faults and vices of the age. But he had that chivalrous honour which, if not equivalent to high principle, imperfectly represents it in some natures in which the loftier motive has unhappily found no place. We have seen how he had been trained from infancy in the love of truth which he claims as the inheritance of his race. He declares, in one of those pregnant aphorisms which, like so many others of his, have been reproduced in more than one shape, that "he who falsifies speech is a traitor to society." A lie, in any form, was what he mortally detested. His feeling on this point was all the stronger because he recognised it as the national vice. He quotes from an old writer of the date of the Emperor Valentinian the caustic apology, that "lying and perjury is not a vice with the French, but a fashion of speech;" and he would make this correction of the statement—that it has now become a virtue with them. He gives a bitter explanation of the jeal-

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ousy with which any imputation upon a man's veracity is resented.

"I have often considered whence sprang this custom, which we observe so religiously, of feeling more deeply offended at being reproached with this vice, which is so common among us, than with any other; and why it should be the highest insult that any one can offer us in words, to accuse us of a lie. I find the explanation to be, that it is natural to defend one's self most warmly on the point where we are weakest. It seems as if, in being moved by the accusation and resenting it, we in some sort absolve ourselves from the fault: if we are guilty of it in fact, at least we condemn it in profession."

He is "scrupulous, even to superstition, in keeping his promises," and, for that reason, not over-ready to make them; and his word is better than his bond.

"The tie that holds me bound by the law of honour seems to me far stronger and more weighty than that of legal obligation: I am throttled less tight by a lawyer than by myself. Is it not reasonable that my conscience should be much more strictly pledged when men have trusted to that simply and entirely? In other cases, my honour owes no debt, because it has been trusted with nothing: let them help themselves as they may by such pledges and securities as they have taken external to myself. I had much rather break the wall of a prison, or break the law, than break my word."—(III. 9.)

So again:—

"I would rather see affairs go to ruin than falsify my own honour to save them. For as to this new virtue of feigning and dissimulation, which is at this moment in such great request, I hate it mortally: of all vices, I know none which shows such meanness and baseness of spirit."—(II. 17.)

And he quotes with strong reprobation the favourite

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maxim of Louis XI., that "he who knows not how to dissemble, knows not how to rule."

A question which has greatly exercised casuists presents but one solution to the Sieur de Montaigne. It is the question whether or no a promise made under compulsion—for example, to save one's life from robbers—is a promise which, by the law of conscience and of honour, must be kept. Here is his answer:—

"What fear has once made me consent to do, I am bound to consent to do when I am in fear no longer; and though it have only forced my word, and not my will, I am bound nevertheless to make good my word. For my own part, if once my tongue has run beyond my intent, I have made it a point of conscience never to disavow it for that reason: otherwise we shall be going the way, step by step, to abolish all right that men have to hold us to our promise or our word. In only one case can private interests justly excuse us in not keeping our promise: if we have promised something immoral or unjust in itself—for the rights of morality ought to take precedence of any right arising from our obligation."—(III. 1.)[1]

Not in quite so high a tone, perhaps, but still in the

[1] It may be interesting to note the different views taken on this question. Cicero, whom Montaigne is here refuting, says roundly that though faith is to be kept, under any circumstances, with an enemy in war, a robber is "the common enemy of the human race," with whom neither promise nor oath holds good. [De Off. lib. iii. 30.] St Thomas Aquinas draws a remarkable distinction. "In an oath extorted by compulsion, there is a twofold obligation: one by which the party is bound to him to whom such promise is made; and this obligation is annulled by the compulsion: but there is another by which a man is bound to God, to fulfil whatever he has promised in His name; and such an obligation is not annulled in the court of conscience, because a man ought rather to suffer any personal loss than violate that oath." [Summa 2nda 2ndæ Quæst. 89. 7. ad 3.] Montaigne's ethics are higher than either.

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thorough spirit of a soldier and a gentleman, with a blindness to one side of the question which we can hardly help excusing, is his strong sense of the degradation incurred in most cases by an apology.

"For the most part, the accommodations of our quarrels in these days are both dishonourable and insincere. We only seek to save appearances, and in so doing we betray and disavow our real meaning: we salve the matter over. We know how we said the thing, and in what sense we said it, and the bystanders know too, and so do all our friends in whose eyes we wished to appear to have the advantage: it is at the expense of our frankness, our honour, and our courage, that we disown our real meaning, and seek for a subterfuge in untruth in order to make peace: we give ourselves the lie, to excuse the lie we have given another. You have no business to consider whether your words or your actions might possibly admit of another interpretation: it is your own real and true interpretation which you are bound thenceforth to maintain, cost you what it may. Men address themselves to your principles and your conscience: these are not things meant to wear masks. Let us leave such low devices and expedients to the chicaneries of the law-courts. The excuses and apologies which I see made every day to cover an indiscretion, seem to me more ungraceful than the indiscretion itself. It is far better to affront your adversary a second time, than to affront yourself by offering him this kind of satisfaction. You braved him when heated with passion, and now you proceed to pacify and flatter him in your cooler and better senses; and so you lower yourself far more than you asserted your superiority at first. I know nothing that can be so unbecoming a gentleman to say, as it is unbecoming for him to unsay at another's dictation; inasmuch as obstinacy is more excusable in him than cowardice."—(III. 10.)

We must remember that, in the writer's days, the duel was a recognised obligation on a man of honour, and

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that the only interpretation to be put upon a gentleman's "eating his words" was that he had not the courage to maintain them. What Montaigne protests against is not a frank and outspoken apology—of that he says nothing—but the shifty explanations which are neither retraction nor defence. We have outgrown the days of duelling; but the change has not improved either the behaviour of men towards each other or the tone of public debate. Bitter personalities, and even imputations of mendacity, which in that sixteenth century a man would have had to answer for with his sword, are recklessly flung out, to be followed by explanations which can satisfy no one, and which would have drawn down the righteous contempt of Montaigne.

Not that he was an admirer of the duel, especially as carried out in those days, when the seconds (whose proper office was only to see fair play) were commonly drawn into their principals' quarrel, against all reason and common-sense. He saw plainly enough that, even as a means of revenge, the killing one's man was not satisfactory:—

"'He shall repent it,' we say: and when we give him a pistol-shot in the head, do we suppose he repents? On the contrary, if we watch, we shall see that he makes a mouth at us as he falls: he is so far from repenting, that he is hardly anything but grateful to us: we do him the kindest office possible, in making him die at once and without suffering; while we have to run and hide ourselves, to escape the officers of justice."

He was in most respects intensely selfish. It was a part of his practical philosophy of life, and he is so far from any consciousness that it would lower him in the

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estimation of his readers, that he takes every opportunity of impressing them with the fact. "My principle is," he says, "to centre and wholly confine myself within myself. I congratulate myself upon being entirely uninterested in other people's affairs, and keeping clear of being guarantee for them, or responsible for anything they do. I would as soon lend any man my blood as my pains." He has "a temperament dull and insensible to evils which do not touch him directly and personally;" and looks upon this want of sensibility "as one of the best points of his natural character." So long as his friends are content "to require nothing of him which involves any great trouble or care—for I have declared open war," he says, "against all trouble—I am easily entreated, and ready to do every man the best service I can." It is but another form of the same feeling that made him hate obligation, and exclaim so emphatically—"How constantly do I beg of Heaven in its mercy that I may never owe essential thanks to any man!"[1]

But against this selfishness, which he appears to exaggerate rather than to excuse, we must set his warm affection, too naturally and simply expressed not to have been sincere, for the memory of the father to whom he attributes all that was best in his own character; and the almost romantic friendship which he was capable of in the case of Stephen la Boëtie. His general kind-heartedness towards his family and his servants (in spite of occasional outbreaks of temper which he candidly admits) may possibly be considered as only another form of selfishness in a man who abhorred domestic worries, and declares that "his chief profession in this life is to

[1] III. 9.

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live at his ease;" but his sympathy with the peasantry must stand on higher ground.

This selfishness and repugnance to the everyday duties of his position must have unfitted him in some degree for domestic life in a country chateau. He is quite conscious of it.

"I am always glad to get away from the management of my own house. No doubt there is a kind of pleasure in giving your own orders, and being obeyed by your servants, were it only in a barn; but it is too monotonous and feeble a gratification. Besides, it necessarily involves a good many vexatious worries: sometimes the poverty and oppression of one's tenants, sometimes a quarrel between neighbours, sometimes the trespasses they make upon one, are a cause of annoyance; and that hardly ever in the six months does Heaven send weather with which one's bailiff is satisfied: if it suits the vines, then it ruins the hay-crops. To say nothing of the neat, well-made shoe the man spoke of—which pinches the owner's foot all the same. . . . The smallest and most trifling annoyances are the most vexing; and as small print most tires the eyes, so do small trifles most annoy us. A crowd of little troubles affects us more than any single one, however great it be. . . . 'Tis uncomfortable to be in a place where everything you see is your business, and concerns you; and I seem to enjoy the comforts of a stranger's house more thoroughly than those of my own, and with a keener and higher relish. Diogenes made answer very much in my humour, when some one asked him what wine he liked best? 'Another man's,' said he."—(III. 9.)

Yet, with all this love of ease, he congratulates himself with having lived in an age which is "not effeminate, or languishing, or indolent." He does not admire his own times, and he sees the dangers of his country; but he does not despair:—

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"Everything that totters does not fall: the construction of such a vast body holds together by more means than one; it holds by its very antiquity, like ancient buildings. . . . For my own part, I do not at all despair of the state, and fancy I see ways of escape for us. Who knows but Heaven will have it happen as in human bodies that purge and restore themselves to a better state by long and grievous maladies, which give them a more entire and perfect health than what they took away?"—(III. 9.)[1]

People had observed in him even in his childhood, he tells us, something "that appeared to savour of pride and arrogance." He does not believe there is really much of it in his character, but that what they noticed was rather a fault of manner than intention. With the exception of some amount of innocent family pride, which gave rise, as has been seen, to some amusing devices to impress strangers with a sufficient idea of his rank, there really seems no reason for the accusation.

To irresolution he has pleaded guilty. "It is a blemish which I will not omit, though unbecoming to publish —a defect very inconvenient in transacting the affairs of this world: in doubtful enterprises I know not which to choose."[2] Certainly, if he carried into the business of practical life the same suspension of judgment which marks his philosophy, the defect was a serious one indeed.

He bore the painful disease which troubled the later years of his life with very considerable patience: ever

[1] Dean Church, in his excellent article on Montaigne (Oxford Essays, 1871, p. 263), says that Montaigne "seems to give up his country as lost." His expressions on the subject vary with his tone of feeling at the moment; but this passage occurs in one of the latest essays.

[2] III. 17.

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ready to express his thankfulness for many years of "happy health and quiet," and recognising gratefully the "beautiful light" of ease and rest that flashes upon us in the intervals of severe pain. He compares his own case favourably with that of many who suffered under longer or more terrible maladies: and especially is glad to believe himself "in a far better condition than a thousand others, who have neither fever nor any other malady save what they bring upon themselves from some defect in their reason."[1] He can generally content himself, even in his worst spasms, with "grunting instead of roaring out;" yet he is quite ready to sympathise with those who, in spite of some stern philosophers, find relief in good honest bawling, and is pleased to quote the authority of Epicurus in support of his view.

In his literary character he is professedly an egotist—his enemies the Port-Royalists are said to have coined the word expressly to describe him. This might seem to imply that he was devoured by vanity, but that neither his mental nor personal characteristics are set forth in flattering colours. His is an egotism of a peculiar kind; and it is the apparent absence of vanity, in the sense commonly attached to the word, that makes it amusing without being offensive. Pascal remarks that "all that is bad in Montaigne (putting his morality out of the question) might have been corrected in a moment, if he had been warned that he was telling too many stories and talking too much about himself."[2] But such a criticism only shows how little qualified the author of it was to understand him. "If he had been warned"! As if Montaigne was not perfectly aware of

[1] II. 37. [2] Pensées, c. 31.

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what he was printing, and did not foresee how many readers like Pascal would, in perfect good faith, make the same objection. His egotism is in fact, to many readers, less offensive than that of a much greater and better man, of whom he sometimes reminds us as we read: Cicero's revelations of his own weaknesses seem to be made as unconsciously as his self-laudation is conscious and obtrusive: Montaigne disarms us by being the first to despise and laugh at himself. He protests that he means to be sincere in his confessions: that he is in no wise anxious to conceal such merits as he has, and that "if he thought himself perfectly good and wise, he would proclaim it to some purpose:" on the other hand, "none can have a meaner opinion of him than he has of himself," and he is "content to be less admired provided he is better known." It is possible, no doubt, for a man to show a good deal of vanity in the confession of his faults: he may wish to have them looked upon as amiable weaknesses,—or as the faults of a clever man, or the eccentricities of genius: and Montaigne gives us at least one hint that he did not think the black side in his own case was so very black when compared with some other shades of the colour. "Those of the weaker sort, who have contributed to the general corruption of the age nothing worse than folly, vanity, and idleness—of whom I am one"—will be the last, he hopes, to be called to account. "In a time when doing what is mischievous is so common, merely to do what is useless becomes in a manner praiseworthy."[1] And—"if it be indiscreet to publish one's faults, at least there is no great danger of its passing into a custom."

[1] III. 9 *ad init.*

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It would have been well indeed had he made no worse contribution to the corruption of his age than folly or idleness. His morals were the morals of that licentious society which found its example and encouragement alike in the Courts of Henry of Valois and Henry of Navarre. We could scarcely expect, perhaps, that it should have been otherwise, and we may be willing to accept his own protest for what it is worth,—that he was not vicious from principle, and that there was an amount of restraint and moderation in his worst indulgences. But there is nothing to excuse the thoughts and the language which he has deliberately introduced here and there into his essays,—moral blotches on their beauty, often without the poor apology that they are used to point a jest or illustrate a phase of human nature. He put them in, he cynically says, because he knew they would please his readers: he did not care, he said, that his book should be "merely a book for a parlour-window." He has succeeded in making it impossible to lay a complete edition of it on a drawing-room table.

It is more pleasant to speak of the general moderation which was one of the practical results of his good sense. In an age of fierce political and religious struggle, when men's stormy passions were at their worst, he took in the scene around him with a large and comprehensive view. That was one secret of his detachment from party.

"When my feelings draw me to one party, it is not with such a violent obligation as to prejudice my judgment. In the present feuds of this nation, my own interest has not made me insensible either to the good qualities to be found in our adversaries, or to what is reprehensible in our own party. People in general worship all that makes for

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their own side; for my own part, I do not even excuse a great deal of what is done on mine: a good book does not lose its merit because it is written against me. . . . I utterly condemn such vicious judgments as this—'He belongs to the League, for he admires the Duke of Guise;' 'The activity of the King of Navarre strikes him as something wonderful; therefore he is a Huguenot:' 'He finds this or that to say against the character of the king; therefore he is a rebel at heart.' I will not admit that a judge is right in condemning a book because the author has ranked a heretic amongst the best poets of the age. Are we not to venture to say of a thief, that he has a good leg?"—(III. 10.)

In a writer so discursive, and whose discursiveness forms to most readers one of his great charms, we should naturally expect to find inconsistencies of thought and expression. He warns us honestly, more than once, what we are to expect on this point.

"Not only does the breath of accident carry me away according to its inclination, but, moreover, I vacillate and change my position, owing to the instability of my own mental posture; and whoever will look into that matter carefully, will hardly find himself twice in the same state. I give my mind sometimes one face, and sometimes another, according to the side on which I turn it. If I speak of myself in different terms, it is that I am looking at myself in a different light. All contradictions show themselves in my character at every turn, or in some shape or other—now bashful, now impudent; now gossiping, and now taciturn; now hard-working, and now fastidious; ingenious or stupid, sullen or agreeable, lying or truthful, learned or ignorant; liberal and covetous and prodigal,—all these characters I can see in myself, in one way or other, according as I turn myself about. And whoever will but study himself attentively, will find in himself—even in his own judgment—the same fluctuations and discordance. I am unable to predicate anything of my-

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self absolutely, simply, and solidly, without mixture or qualification, in one single word: *Distinguo* is the rule of most universal application in my logic."—(II. 1.)

He has seen, he says, many a so-called miracle in his time; but never has he met with "such a monster or such a miracle (in the sense of a compound of contradictions) as himself."[1]

Some of these contradictions in his character come out broadly enough. The man who professes, and no doubt with the most thorough sincerity, to have had such a mortal hatred of cruelty that he could not, "without pain, see even an innocent beast hunted and killed, when it has made no defence, and when we have received from it no kind of provocation,"[2]—who notes how the habit of entertaining themselves with the combats of wild beasts in the amphitheatre gave the Romans a taste for the same cruel pleasure in their shows of gladiators,—yet takes occasion elsewhere to speak of these very shows as "a wonderful example, and of great advantage in the training of a nation, to see a hundred, two hundred, nay a thousand pairs of combatants matched in arms one against the other, hew each other in pieces day after day before their eyes; and that with such constancy of courage, that one never knew them let fall a word of weakness or pity, never turn their back, or make a single cowardly movement to avoid their adversary's blow."[3] He is merciless in his denunciation of the pomps and vanities of office and the ceremonies of Courts; yet who could be more innocently proud of the collar of the Order of St Michel, or his diploma as a

[1] II. 17. [2] Ibid., chap. 11. [3] Ibid., chap. 23.

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citizen of Rome? or more careful that every foreign hotel which had been honoured with the presence of the Seigneur de Montaigne should have that event recorded by an escutcheon of his family arms? We find him railing against medicine in theory and practice—not, as has been said, without some reasons which might commend themselves to his good sense: but we can scarcely think that he shows this good sense consistently in drinking large doses of all kinds of mineral waters on his own responsibility, or in applying while at Rome to an old Arabian patriarch of Antioch for a specific for his complaint. This readiness to follow empiricism in preference to authority, in questions of religion as well as medicine, is common enough; but it is not in accordance with Montaigne's general principle. He writes a whole essay in praise of solitude, keeping much more closely to his subject than he is generally wont to do; but, when he has arrived at the time of life at which he declares that solitude is best for us—for "it is full time to wean ourselves from society when we can no longer add anything to it"—we find him apparently anxious to escape from himself, if he can but find pleasant and congenial company.

"I, who have no other object in life but to live and enjoy myself, would run from one end of the world to the other to get one good twelvemonth of pleasant and agreeable quiet. A dull and sombre quiet I can find fast enough, but this makes me drowsy and stupid; I am not fond of it. If there is any person, or any set of good fellows anywhere, in town or country, in France or elsewhere, at home or on their travels, whom my humour would suit and whose humours would suit me, let them only whistle, and I will come and supply them with the Essays in flesh and blood."—(III. 5.)

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Any who should have responded to the challenge, (how many, "in France or elsewhere," would respond now!) and who could entertain their guest in anything like a congenial spirit, would surely have secured a year of such society as was and is rarely to be found "in town or country." With all his contradictions and with all his faults, how certainly we should say of him, with Madame de Sevigné—"What a charming man! what good company he is!"

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CHAPTER VII.

VIEWS ON RELIGION.

THERE remains the question which suggests itself to all readers of the Essays,—which has been variously answered, and to which no definite answer seems possible, —What was Montaigne's religious belief? or rather, perhaps, what were his views upon that great subject? Was he a Christian—of whatever dim and undogmatic kind—in belief as well as in outward profession? or was he the sceptic, sounding all creeds and embracing none, noting the weak side in every form of human faith as well as human philosophy? or was he the secret enemy of a faith which was too pure for him, attacking it covertly under the guise of a calm philosophical inquirer, or sometimes of a well-intentioned but somewhat scandalised friend?

This last view is supported by the authority of a great name — Sainte Beuve. He sees in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" (which is really a rambling theological treatise looking out of place in these essays) nothing more or less than a subtle assault upon Christianity. Of this "Apology" (curiously dedicated to Margaret of Navarre) it is not easy to give any con-

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nected idea—far less any attempt at analysis—because it is very difficult to believe that the author himself was at the pains to carry out in it any leading propositions or arguments which he might have had in his mind when he began. Sebond's 'Natural Theology' (which Montaigne, as has been already said, had translated at his father's request) seems to have been derived chiefly from the writings of St Thomas Aquinas. It was designed to defend the Catholic faith by arguments drawn from human reason, — using in its support the very weapon which the religious reformers had unsheathed against it. The attempt had not found favour, and Sebond seems to have set himself a task beyond his powers. Montaigne apparently undertakes to answer certain objections which had been made to the argument of the book. Some had objected that it was setting up a dangerous principle to refer to reason what must be matter of revelation and faith. A second class of objectors accused Sebond's reasoning as being weak, and insufficient to prove the case which it supported. In reply to the first, the apologist admits that true faith ought to be sufficient without the aid of reason. But is it so? he asks; or where is such faith to be found? and he launches forth discursively against the contrast between professed Christian faith and actual Christian morality,—between the purity of Christian doctrine and the evil passions evoked in its defence. He remarks, as many have remarked in a longer form of words, that "there is no enmity so perfect as the Christian." To the second objection he would reply, that the arguments of Sebond may well be weak, for so are all arguments in such a matter: human

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reason—on which men so pride themselves—is utterly powerless, and the wisdom of the wisest is but folly in the sight of Heaven. We find nothing more in the way of defence of Sebond or his book. Like so many of the other essays, the title is little more than a hint of what was in his view when he sat down to write; he is hurried off, very willingly, into that general questioning of men's power to know anything at all, which was always the dominating thought in his mind. Sainte Beuve sees in the whole of this a subtle and intentional attack upon the Christian faith—in short, "pure Spinozaism" carefully veiled. In dethroning human reason, he says, the "apologist" dethrones belief; and the general conclusion is to make the Deity unknown and inaccessible. It is impossible to differ from such a master of criticism without great hesitation. But acute minds will sometimes find in an author's book, as Montaigne has said, more than the author ever put there; and very few readers of this "Apology" would see in it what the great French critic discovers. Nor would anything in Montaigne's writings lead us to the conclusion that he had either the inclination or the sustained ability to carry on a war of that kind upon any form of belief, Christian or Mohammedan. He was a free lance in the field of creed and dogma (bating a formal allegiance to the Catholic Church), and struck pretty sharp blows wherever he thought he saw a weak point in the harness of philosopher, priest, or reformer,—but he was hardly the man to stab in the dark. It is difficult to say whether the concluding passage was penned in thorough earnestness or not: the language is that of one who admits all the weakness of human nature, all its need of divine aid; but it may

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be that of one who doubts whether such aid be existent or attainable. Yet it is very difficult to believe that it conveys a covert sneer at those who are so credulous as to look for this assistance. He has just quoted Seneca to this effect—"What a vile and abject thing is man, if he cannot lift himself above humanity!" and then he adds this peroration:—

"Here we have a true thought, and a profitable wish, but at the same time a vain one: for to make the grasp larger than the hand, the armful greater than the arm, and to hope to stride wider than our legs can stretch,—that is monstrous and impossible. Nor can man rise above himself and humanity: for he can only see with his eyes, and seize but with his grasp. He shall be raised, if God lend him a hand in extraordinary sort: he shall exalt himself, by abandoning and renouncing his own natural means, and suffering himself to be raised and elevated by means purely divine. It is to our Christian faith, not to our Stoical virtue, that so divine and miraculous a metamorphosis belongs."

The whole of this "Apology" seems at least as destructive of human reason as of religious faith. It appears as though it were impossible for Montaigne to write on any subject which was matter of human judgment and belief, without allowing his indomitable Pyrrhonism to carry him away. When he sat down to write an apology, his love of always taking the destructive side of the argument was very likely to convert it into an attack.

Those who would claim him as a son of the Church—negligent, undemonstrative, undutiful, a prodigal, only not rebellious—have not a little evidence on their side. Let us pass over the scene at his death: in those solemn moments there may flash upon a man's mind other

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thoughts than those he had in life, or he may choose not to die so as to shock even recognised conventionalism. We remember Socrates and his sacrifice to Æsculapius. Nor need we attach much weight, perhaps, to Montaigne's handsome votive offering at Loretto; we remember it contained statuettes of himself, his wife, and his daughter: he was fond of publishing himself, and this was an opportunity of doing so in a choice edition. But we learn quite casually, for it is put in the most natural manner, that he said his Paternoster every night before he went to bed; that he held the sign of the cross in constant use and reverence;[1] that it was "his habit" to communicate: and that he at least occasionally went to confession—as often, perhaps, as other gentlemen of his day. He never speaks of the Church but with a certain reverence, and expresses, in very natural and simple language, his desire to adhere to it in life and death—"the Apostolical and Roman Catholic Church, in which I was born, and in which I will die."[2]

He thinks the Church is right in interdicting "the promiscuous, rash, and indiscreet use of the holy and divine Psalms which the Holy Spirit dictated to David." Nor does it please him "to see the Holy Book of our sacred mysteries and faith knocked about in the hall or in the kitchen." The reading of the Scriptures should always be "a settled and deliberate act, to which we ought always to apply the preface in our Office—'*Sursum Corda;*' and to address ourselves to it with even our bodies composed to such a bearing as may testify a special reverence and attention." He would have the general study of the Bible permitted only to the priests,

[1] I. 56. [2] Ibid.

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and more than doubts the wisdom of having it translated into the vulgar tongue.

Nor are there wanting some indications of a religious faith of a wider kind than a mere outward adhesion to the rule of the Church of Rome. He never alludes to the Books of Scripture, or quotes from them (as he often does) but in what seems a reverent spirit. He seldom mentions sacred names; but when he does, it is "Our Blessed Guide"—"Our Divine and Celestial King." The Lord's Prayer is spoken of in these remarkable words:—

"Since by special favour of Divine goodness a certain form of prayer has been prescribed and dictated to us, word for word, by the mouth of God, it has always seemed to me that we ought to make more general use of it than we do; and, if I were to advise, both at sitting down to table and at rising up, at getting up and going to bed, and on all special occasions when prayer is wont to be introduced, I would have Christians make use of the Lord's Prayer, if not only, at least always. The Church may expand and vary prayers, as is needed for our instruction, for I know well that the substance and the meaning is still the same; yet that prayer ought to enjoy this privilege, that people should have it constantly on their lips; for it is certain that it contains all that is needful, and is excellently suited for all occasions.[1] It is the only prayer I regularly make use of, and I repeat it instead of changing it: and so it comes to pass that I remember none so well as that."—(I. 56.)

The separation of faith from practice, of devotion from conscience—common as it has been always, specially notable, perhaps, in an age which united superstis-

[1] He had possibly read in St Augustin, "It is the embodiment of all desires: thou mayest not ask aught besides"—Serm. 106.

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tion with licentiousness—struck his keen mind as a wretched anomaly.

"It is a doctrine subversive of all good government, far more mischievous than it is ingenious and subtle, which teaches the people that a religious belief will alone suffice, without moral conduct, to satisfy the Divine justice."—(III. 12.)

What, again, can show a stronger appreciation of what is or is not a true devotional spirit, than the following words in the essay "On Prayers"?

"We must have our souls pure, and cleansed from vicious passions, at least at the moment we are praying to Him: otherwise we do but present Him with the rods wherewith to chastise us. Instead of repairing our fault, we double it, when we offer to Him of whom we ask pardon feelings full of irreverence and hatred. This is why I cannot find it in my heart to praise those whom I observe praying oftenest and most regularly, if the actions which lie close upon their prayers give me no evidence of their amendment and reformation. The practice of a man who mixes up devotion with an abominable life seems in some sort more to be condemned than that of a man who is consistent with himself, and dissolute altogether. . . . I am scandalised to see a man cross himself thrice at the Benedicite, and as often at saying grace, and to see him nevertheless fill up all the other hours of the day with hatred, avarice, and injustice; giving his one hour to God, as if by way of bargain and compensation."

There are noble passages, again, in the "Apology." He is speaking of the need that man, constituted as he is, has of a religion not purely mental.

"The human mind could not support itself floating in the infinity of immaterial thoughts: it needs to mould them into a form in accordance with itself. Thus the Divine Majesty

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has, for our sakes, in some sort, suffered Himself to be circumscribed within corporal limits; His mysterious and heavenly sacraments have symbols drawn from our earthly condition; His worship finds expression in sensible offices and words; for that which believes and prays is man. It would be hard to persuade me that the sight of our crucifixes, the representation of that piteous Passion—the ornaments and the solemn ritual of our churches—the voices attuned to the devotion of our thoughts, and all that emotion of the senses—do not warm the souls of the congregation with a religious fervour very wholesome in its effect."

The popular notion, which attributes to the providence of God the issues of great and important events only, takes but a narrow view of the Divine government, to his mind.

"Because they weigh much with us, we conclude they weigh correspondingly with Him, and that He regards them more watchfully and attentively than other events of less moment to us, or which come in the natural course." (Here he quotes Cicero, to the effect that the gods, like earthly monarchs, concern themselves with great matters only)—"As if to that heavenly King it were more or less to overthrow a kingdom than to shake the leaf of a tree; or as though His providence worked after a different method in determining the event of a battle than the leap of a flea! The hand of His government lends itself to all things after the same method, with the same power and the same order: our interests do not affect its working; our inclinations and degrees touch Him not: 'He is a great artificer in great things; but after such fashion as not to be less so in little things.'[1] It is our own arrogance that sets this blasphemous comparison always before us."

But quite as important to the question as anything which Montaigne has said is what he has left unsaid.

[1] He is quoting the grand words of St Augustin: "*Deus ita artifex magnus in magnis, ut minor non sit in parvis*"—De Civit. Dei, xi. 22.

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We have already seen that, in his system of education, as well as in his speculations upon death, there is one remarkable and grave omission. There is the same want throughout his writings. As to a future state—as to any life but the present—he maintains always a marked and ominous silence. For almost anything that appears to the contrary in the philosophy of the Essays, death might mean annihilation. There are not more than two or three passages in which he lets a thought escape him as to what lies beyond. In his third essay, which is an expansion in his most characteristic style of the Horatian motto in his library—"Vex not thy spirit about the future"—he has these few words:—

"We are never at home in the present: fear, desire, and hope are ever thrusting us towards the future, and robbing us of the feeling and enjoyment of what is, to amuse us with speculations as to what shall be, even when we are no more. . . . Wisdom is content with the present, and never dissatisfied with itself: Epicurus gives his wise man a dispensation from all forethought and care for the future."

And we have something like it again, further on:—

"Whatever falls within our cognisance and enjoyment, we feel does not satisfy us, and we still pant and long after things future and unknown, inasmuch as the present do not content us at all; not that, in my judgment, they are insufficient for it, but because we grasp them with a feeble and ill-regulated hold."[1]—(I. 53 *ad fin.*)

Epicurus and Lucretius—these are his authorities. It may possibly be said that he means no more than is meant by the line of Pope—

"Man never is, but always to be, blest."

And we may set against these passages, for what it may

[1] See Lucretius, III. 1095.

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be worth, the following from the "Apology;" the argument of which seems almost destructive of personal identity in any future state, unless that state resemble the paradise of Mahomet or the "garden of Pluto;" there can be no sense of happiness common to the mortal and the immortal:—

"If the pleasures you promise us in that other life be the same as I have enjoyed here below, they have nothing in common with infinity. . . . If there be anything there of mine, then there is nothing divine: if that be nothing more than might belong to our present condition, then it cannot be taken into account at all. All that satisfies mortals must be mortal; the recognition of our parents, our children, and our friends, if that can affect and rejoice us in another world,—if we still retain that kind of gratification,—we are still in the sphere of earthly and finite pleasures. We cannot worthily conceive the grandeur of those high and divine promises, if indeed we can conceive them at all: to have a worthy idea of them, we must imagine them to be past imagination, past speech and comprehension, and quite other than what belong to our wretched experience. 'Eye hath not seen,' says St Paul, 'nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him.' And if, to make us capable of this, our being were reformed and changed, it must be such an extreme and total change that by physical laws it will be no longer us—it will be some one else that will receive these rewards."

It is a fine passage; but what does it really mean? In spite of the quotation from St Paul, does it not place the notion of a life to come so far out of the region of man's knowledge, as to make it practically beyond his hopes or fears?

He has been accused also, and not without some reason, of having denied the need or efficacy of repentance. The

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Port-Royal school were naturally much scandalised at such an attack on one of the vital principles of the Gospel. But if we read his chapter "On Repentance," we find that what he specially questions is the probability of repentance to any good purpose in the case of a man who, with full knowledge, has chosen a sensual course of life, and the worth of a repentance which arises from cowardice rather than change of heart. He does not believe in the reality of a change induced only by the fear of death—"I abominate that accidental repentance which old age brings with it." Abstinence from vicious pleasures when we can no longer indulge them he holds to be "but a chilly and rheumatic virtue;" and as to the kind of repentance induced by trials and afflictions, he does not think they would have that effect upon his own nature:—

"That is for people who can only be roused by a whip; my own reason runs a freer course in prosperity; it is much more distracted and worried by pains than by pleasures; I can see further in clear weather; health admonishes me, not only more pleasantly, but more effectively, than sickness."

Whatever we may think of this philosophy, it is not unnatural in a man of Montaigne's temperament; and although it puts out of sight one side of Christian doctrine, it is difficult to say that it is opposed to Christianity in itself.

"For myself, I may desire to be in general other than I am. I may condemn and disallow my whole character, and pray God for an entire reformation, and that he will excuse my natural frailty, but it seems to me that I have no right to call that repentance, any more than the being dissatisfied at not being an angel or a Cato."

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He does not so much question the doctrine of repentance in theory, as the applicability of the popular notion of it to his own case.

Still, look at it as we will, his is a mind in which Christianity seems to find no place. If he does not reject it, he practically ignores its influence. It is his favourite pagans who furnish him with precepts and examples: he evidently thinks more of Seneca than of St Paul. We are left to the conclusion that, in religion as in philosophy, his creed was doubt. He could not solve for himself the great enigma of life: he scarcely made any earnest attempt to do so.

It would be possible to make some excuses for his attitude towards the religion of his day, and for the attitude of Pascal and the Port-Royalists, always loud in their charges of infidelity, towards himself. He believed strongly in human nature; and the doctrine of its utter corruption, and the sovereign efficacy of divine grace, was what he could not accept. And this, as Sainte Beuve remarks, is what the school of Port-Royal so hated in him, — "the natural man" — "pure nature without grace."[1] They saw in him besides the representative of the new and evil philosophy of the day, and their protest was emphatic and honest.

But what was the shape in which Christianity presented itself to Montaigne? What he saw most earnest in it was the school of asceticism, against which his whole nature rebelled. As to the question between Catholics and Protestants, what were the principles in force amongst the religious factions of his time? He gave his opinion of them to De Thou: he said that

[1] Hist. of Port-Royal, liv. iii. c. 2.

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it appeared to him that "religion was but a specious pretext for enlisting partisans; that it touched the hearts of neither one party nor the other; that nothing but the fear of being deserted by the Protestants kept the King of Navarre from returning to the faith of his ancestors, and that the Duke of Guise would have made little objection to the Confession of Augsburg, if he could only have adopted it without prejudice to his interests."

"Let us confess the truth: if any man were to pick out of the army—even the king's army—those who have taken up arms out of pure zeal for religion, and again those who have solely in view the defence of the laws of their country or the service of their prince, he could hardly muster out of them one complete company of soldiers."—(Ap. for Sebond.)

He saw in Henry III. all the superstition of a monk combined with the worst vices of a heathen, and he saw Henry of Navarre purchase his Paris with a mass. Such religious zeal as there was on either side showed itself chiefly in a strong desire to persecute. These were aspects of Christianity little likely to attract a keen and honest intelligence, or to supply a satisfactory answer to the eternal questionings of his irresolute spirit.

END OF MONTAIGNE.

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